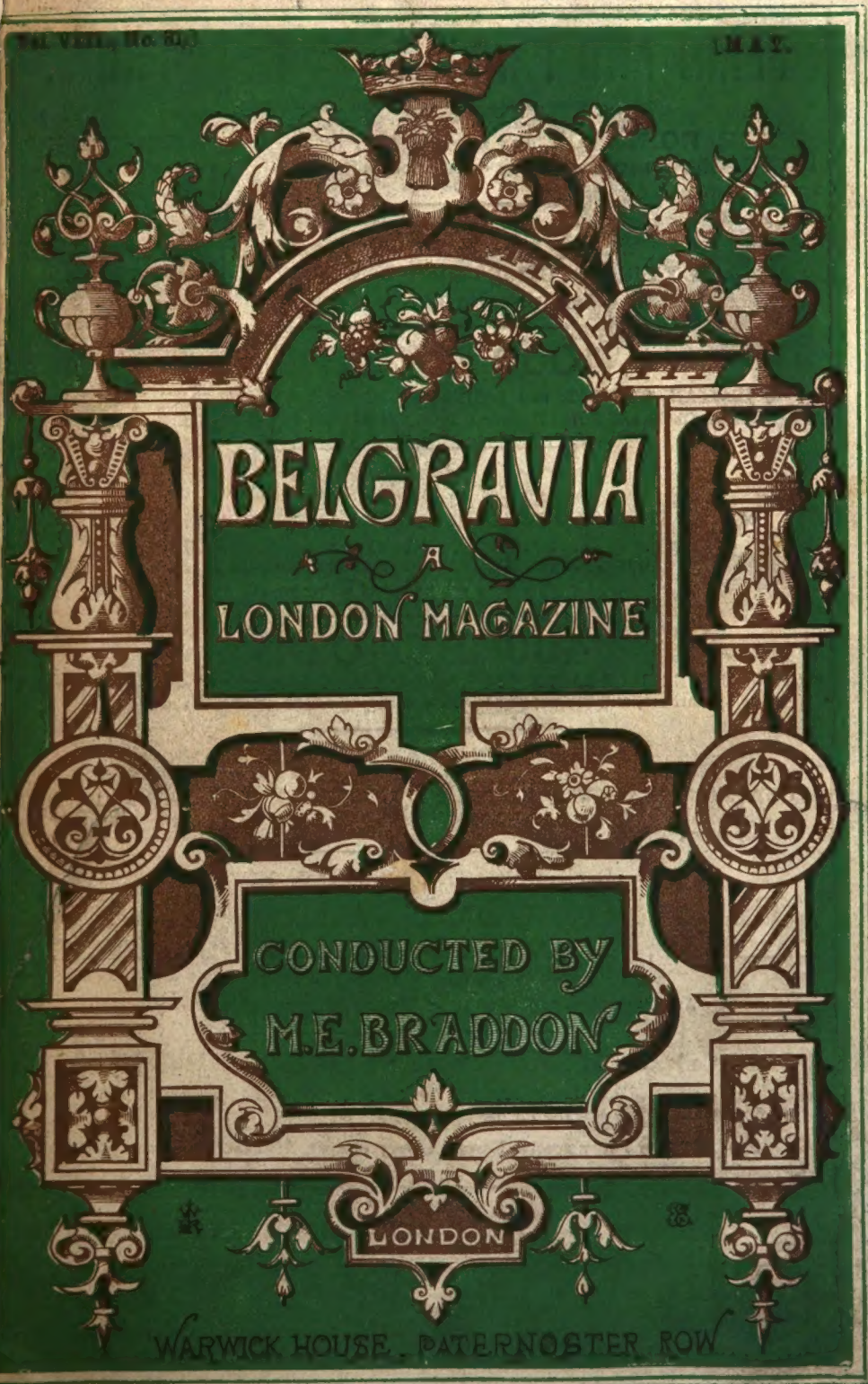
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Stories from Belgravia, Part 1 (1867-1871)

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EVELINE'S VISITANT

A Ghost Story

BY THE EDITOR

It was at a masked ball at the Palais Royal that my fatal quarrel with my first cousin André de Brissac began. The quarrel was about a woman. The women who followed the footsteps of Philip of Orleans were the causes of many such disputes; and there was scarcely one fair head in all that glittering throng which, to a man versed in social histories and mysteries, might not have seemed bedabbled with blood.

I shall not record the name of her for love of whom André de Brissac and I crossed one of the bridges, in the dim August dawn, on our way to the waste ground beyond the church of Saint-Germain des Près.

There were many beautiful vipers in those days, and she was one of them. I can feel the chill breath of that August morning blowing in my face, as I sit in my dismal chamber at my château of Puy Verdun to-night, alone in the stillness, writing the strange story of my life. I can see the white mist rising from the river, the grim outline of the Châtelet, and the square towers of Notre Dame black against the pale gray sky. Even more vividly can I recall André's fair young face, as he stood opposite to me with his two friends—scoundrels both, and alike eager for that unnatural fray. We were a strange group to be seen in a summer sunrise, all of us fresh from the heat and clamour of the Regent's saloons—André, in a quaint hunting-dress copied from a family portrait at Puy Verdun, I costumed as one of Law's Mississippi Indians; the other men in like garish frippery, adorned with broideries and jewels that looked wan in the pale light of dawn.

Our quarrel had been a fierce one—a quarrel which could have but one result, and that the direst. I had struck him; and the welt raised by my open hand was crimson upon his fair womanish face as he stood opposite to me. The eastern sun shone on the face presently, and dyed the cruel mark with a deeper red; but the sting of my own wrongs was fresh, and I had not yet learned to despise myself for that brutal outrage.

To André de Brissac such an insult was most terrible. He was the favourite of Fortune, the favourite of women; and I was nothing,—a rough soldier who had done my country good service, but in the boudoir of a Parabère a mannerless boor.

We fought, and I wounded him mortally. Life had been very sweet for him; and I think that a frenzy of despair took possession of him when he felt the life-blood ebbing away. He beckoned me to him as he lay on the ground. I went, and knelt at his side.

"Forgive me, André!" I murmured.

He took no more heed of my words than if that piteous entreaty had been the idle ripple of the river near at hand.

"Listen to me, Hector de Brissac," he said. "I am not one who believes that a man has done with earth because his eyes glaze and his jaw stiffens. They will bury me in the old vault at Puy Verdun; and you will be master of the château. Ah, I know how lightly they take things in these days, and how Dubois will laugh when he hears that *Ça* has been killed in a duel. They will bury me, and sing masses for my soul; but you and I have not finished our affair yet, my cousin. I will be with you when you least look to see me,—I, with this ugly scar upon the face that women have praised and loved. I will come to you when your life seems brightest. I will come between you and all that you hold fairest and dearest. My ghostly hand shall drop a poison in your cup of joy. My shadowy form shall shut the sunlight from your life. Men with such iron will as mine can do what they please, Hector de Brissac. It is my will to haunt you when I am dead."

All this in short broken sentences he whispered into my ear. I had need to bend my ear close to his dying lips; but the iron will of André de Brissac was strong enough to do battle with Death, and I believe he said all he wished to say before his head fell back upon the velvet cloak they had spread beneath him, never to be lifted again.

As he lay there, you would have fancied him a fragile stripling, too fair and frail for the struggle called life; but there are those who remember the brief manhood of André de Brissac, and who can bear witness to the terrible force of that proud nature.

I stood looking down at the young face with that foul mark upon it; and God knows I was sorry for what I had done.

Of those blasphemous threats which he had whispered in my ear I took no heed. I was a soldier, and a believer. There was nothing absolutely dreadful to me in the thought that I had killed this man. I had killed many men on the battle-field; and this one had done me cruel wrong.

My friends would have had me cross the frontier to escape the consequences of my act; but I was ready to face those consequences, and I remained in France. I kept aloof from the court, and received a hint that I had best confine myself to my own province. Many masses were chanted in the little chapel of Puy Verdun for the soul of my dead cousin, and his coffin filled a niche in the vault of our ancestors.

His death had made me a rich man; and the thought that it was so made my newly-acquired wealth very hateful to me. I lived a lonely existence in the old château, where I rarely held converse with any but the servants of the household, all of whom had served my cousin, and none of whom liked me.

It was a hard and bitter life. It galled me, when I rode through the village, to see the peasant-children shrink away from me. I have

seen old women cross themselves stealthily as I passed them by. Strange reports had gone forth about me; and there were those who whispered that I had given my soul to the Evil One as the price of my cousin's heritage. From my boyhood I had been dark of visage and stern of manner; and hence, perhaps, no woman's love had ever been mine. I remember my mother's face in all its changes of expression; but I can remember no look of affection that ever shone on me. That other woman, beneath whose feet I laid my heart, was pleased to accept my homage, but she never loved me; and the end was treachery.

I had grown hateful to myself, and had well-nigh begun to hate my fellow-creatures, when a feverish desire seized upon me, and I pined to be back in the press and throng of the busy world once again. I went back to Paris, where I kept myself aloof from the court, and where an angel took compassion upon me.

She was the daughter of an old comrade, a man whose merits had been neglected, whose achievements had been ignored, and who sulked in his shabby lodging like a rat in a hole, while all Paris went mad with the Scotch Financier, and gentlemen and lacqueys were trampling one another to death in the Rue Quincampoix. The only child of this little cross-grained old captain of dragoons was an incarnate sunbeam, whose mortal name was Eveline Duchalet.

She loved me. The richest blessings of our lives are often those which cost us least. I wasted the best years of my youth in the worship of a wicked woman, who jilted and cheated me at last. I gave this meek angel but a few courteous words—a little fraternal tenderness—and lo, she loved me. The life which had been so dark and desolate grew bright beneath her influence; and I went back to Puy Verdun with a fair young bride for my companion.

Ah, how sweet a change there was in my life and in my home! The village children no longer shrank appalled as the dark horseman rode by, the village crones no longer crossed themselves; for a woman rode by his side—a woman whose charities had won the love of all those ignorant creatures, and whose companionship had transformed the gloomy lord of the château into a loving husband and a gentle master. The old retainers forgot the untimely fate of my cousin, and served me with cordial willingness, for love of their young mistress.

There are no words which can tell the pure and perfect happiness of that time. I felt like a traveller who had traversed the frozen seas of an arctic region, remote from human love or human companionship, to find himself on a sudden in the bosom of a verdant valley, in the sweet atmosphere of home. The change seemed too bright to be real; and I strove in vain to put away from my mind the vague suspicion that my new life was but some fantastic dream.

So brief were those halcyon hours, that, looking back on them now, it is scarcely strange if I am still half inclined to fancy the first days of my married life could have been no more than a dream.

Neither in my days of gloom nor in my days of happiness had I been troubled by the recollection of André's blasphemous oath. The words which with his last breath he had whispered in my ear were vain and meaningless to me. He had vented his rage in those idle threats, as he might have vented it in idle execrations. That he will haunt the footsteps of his enemy after death is the one revenge which a dying man can promise himself; and if men had power thus to avenge themselves, the earth would be peopled with phantoms.

I had lived for three years at Puy Verdun; sitting alone in the solemn midnight by the hearth where he had sat, pacing the corridors that had echoed his footfall; and in all that time my fancy had never so played me false as to shape the shadow of the dead.

Is it strange, then, if I had forgotten André's horrible promise?

There was no portrait of my cousin at Puy Verdun. It was the age of boudoir art, and a miniature set in the lid of a gold bonbonnière, or hidden artfully in a massive bracelet, was more fashionable than a clumsy life-size image, fit only to hang on the gloomy walls of a provincial château rarely visited by its owner. My cousin's fair face had adorned more than one bonbonnière, and had been concealed in more than one bracelet; but it was not among the faces that looked down from the paneled walls of Puy Verdun.

In the library I found a picture which awoke painful associations. It was the portrait of a De Brissac, who had flourished in the time of Francis the First; and it was from this picture that my cousin André had copied the quaint hunting-dress he wore at the Regent's ball. The library was a room in which I spent a good deal of my life; and I ordered a curtain to be hung before this picture.

We had been married three months, when Eveline one day asked,

"Who is the lord of the château nearest to this?"

I looked at her with astonishment.

"My dearest," I answered, "do you not know that there is no other château within forty miles of Puy Verdun?"

"Indeed!" she said; "that is strange."

I asked her why the fact seemed strange to her; and after much entreaty I obtained from her the reason of her surprise.

In her walks about the park and woods during the last month, she had met a man who, by his dress and bearing, was obviously of noble rank. She had imagined that he occupied some château near at hand, and that his estate adjoined ours. I was at a loss to imagine who this stranger could be; for my estate of Puy Verdun lay in the heart of a desolate region, and unless when some traveller's coach went lumbering and jingling through the village, one had little more chance of encountering a gentleman than of meeting a demigod.

"Have you seen this man often, Eveline?" I asked.

She answered, in a tone which had a touch of sadness, "I see him every day."

"Where, dearest?"

"Sometimes in the park, sometimes in the wood. You know the little cascade, Hector, where there is some old neglected rock-work that forms a kind of cavern. I have taken a fancy to that spot, and have spent many mornings there reading. Of late I have seen the stranger there every morning."

"He has never dared to address you?"

"Never. I have looked up from my book, and have seen him standing at a little distance, watching me silently. I have continued reading; and when I have raised my eyes again I have found him gone. He must approach and depart with a stealthy tread, for I never hear his footfall. Sometimes I have almost wished that he would speak to me. It is so terrible to see him standing silently there."

"He is some insolent peasant who seeks to frighten you."

My wife shook her head.

"He is no peasant," she answered. "It is not by his dress alone I judge, for that is strange to me. He has an air of nobility which it is impossible to mistake."

"Is he young or old?"

"He is young and handsome."

I was much disturbed by the idea of this stranger's intrusion on my wife's solitude; and I went straight to the village to inquire if any stranger had been seen there. I could hear of no one. I questioned the servants closely, but without result. Then I determined to accompany my wife in her walks, and to judge for myself of the rank of the stranger.

For a week I devoted all my mornings to rustic rambles with Eveline in the park and woods; and in all that week we saw no one but an occasional peasant in *sabots*, or one of our own household returning from a neighbouring farm.

I was a man of studious habits, and those summer rambles disturbed the even current of my life. My wife perceived this, and entreated me to trouble myself no further.

"I will spend my mornings in the pleasaunce, Hector," she said; "the stranger cannot intrude upon me there."

"I begin to think the stranger is only a phantasm of your own romantic brain," I replied, smiling at the earnest face lifted to mine. "A châtelaine who is always reading romances may well meet handsome cavaliers in the woodlands. I daresay I have Mdlle. Scuderi to thank for this noble stranger, and that he is only the great Cyrus in modern costume."

"Ah, that is the point which mystifies me, Hector," she said. "The stranger's costume is not modern. He looks as an old picture might look if it could descend from its frame."

Her words pained me, for they reminded me of that hidden picture in the library, and the quaint hunting costume of orange and purple which André de Brissac wore at the Regent's ball.

After this my wife confined her walks to the pleasaunce; and for many weeks I heard no more of the nameless stranger. I dismissed all thought of him from my mind, for a graver and heavier care had come upon me. My wife's health began to droop. The change in her was so gradual as to be almost imperceptible to those who watched her day by day. It was only when she put on a rich gala dress which she had not worn for months that I saw how wasted the form must be on which the embroidered bodice hung so loosely, and how wan and dim were the eyes which had once been brilliant as the jewels she wore in her hair.

I sent a messenger to Paris to summon one of the court physicians; but I knew that many days must needs elapse before he could arrive at Puy Verdun.

In the interval I watched my wife with unutterable fear.

It was not her health only that had declined. The change was more painful to behold than any physical alteration. The bright and sunny spirit had vanished, and in the place of my joyous young bride I beheld a woman weighed down by rooted melancholy. In vain I sought to fathom the cause of my darling's sadness. She assured me that she had no reason for sorrow or discontent, and that if she seemed sad without a motive, I must forgive her sadness, and consider it as a misfortune rather than a fault.

I told her that the court physician would speedily find some cure for her despondency, which must needs arise from physical causes, since she had no real ground for sorrow. But although she said nothing, I could see she had no hope or belief in the healing powers of medicine.

One day, when I wished to beguile her from that pensive silence in which she was wont to sit an hour at a time, I told her, laughing, that she appeared to have forgotten her mysterious cavalier of the wood, and it seemed also as if he had forgotten her.

To my wonderment, her pale face became of a sudden crimson; and from crimson changed to pale again in a breath.

"You have never seen him since you deserted your woodland grotto?" I said.

She turned to me with a heart-rending look.

"Hector," she cried, "I see him every day; and it is that which is killing me."

She burst into a passion of tears when she had said this. I took her in my arms as if she had been a frightened child, and tried to comfort her.

"My darling, this is madness," I said. "You know that no stran-

ger can come to you in the pleasaunce. The moat is ten feet wide and always full of water, and the gates are kept locked day and night by old Massou. The châtelaine of a mediæval fortress need fear no intruder in her antique garden."

My wife shook her head sadly.

"I see him every day," she said.

On this I believed that my wife was mad. I shrank from questioning her more closely concerning her mysterious visitant. It would be ill, I thought, to give a form and substance to the shadow that tormented her by too close inquiry about its look and manner, its coming and going.

I took care to assure myself that no stranger to the household could by any possibility penetrate to the pleasaunce. Having done this, I was fain to await the coming of the physician.

He came at last. I revealed to him the conviction which was my misery. I told him that I believed my wife to be mad. He saw her—spent an hour alone with her, and then came to me. To my unspeakable relief he assured me of her sanity.

"It is just possible that she may be affected by one delusion," he said; "but she is so reasonable upon all other points, that I can scarcely bring myself to believe her the subject of a monomania. I am rather inclined to think that she really sees the person of whom she speaks. She described him to me with a perfect minuteness. The descriptions of scenes or individuals given by patients afflicted with monomania are always more or less disjointed; but your wife spoke to me as clearly and calmly as I am now speaking to you. Are you sure there is no one who can approach her in that garden where she walks?"

"I am quite sure."

"Is there any kinsman of your steward, or hanger-on of your household,—a young man with a fair womanish face, very pale, and rendered remarkable by a crimson scar, which looks like the mark of a blow?"

"My God!" I cried, as the light broke in upon me all at once. "And the dress—the strange old-fashioned dress?"

"The man wears a hunting costume of purple and orange," answered the doctor.

I knew then that André de Brissac had kept his word, and that in the hour when my life was brightest his shadow had come between me and happiness.

I showed my wife the picture in the library, for I would fain assure myself that there was some error in my fancy about my cousin. She shook like a leaf when she beheld it, and clung to me convulsively.

"This is witchcraft, Hector," she said. "The dress in that picture is the dress of the man I see in the pleasaunce; but the face is not his."

Then she described to me the face of the stranger; and it was my cousin's face line for line—André de Brissac, whom she had never seen

in the flesh. Most vividly of all did she describe the cruel mark upon his face, the trace of a fierce blow from an open hand.

After this I carried my wife away from Puy Verdun. We wandered far—through the southern provinces, and into the very heart of Switzerland. I thought to distance the ghastly phantom, and I fondly hoped that change of scene would bring peace to my wife.

It was not so. Go where we would, the ghost of André de Brissac followed us. To my eyes that fatal shadow never revealed itself. *That* would have been too poor a vengeance. It was my wife's innocent heart which André made the instrument of his revenge. The unholy presence destroyed her life. My constant companionship could not shield her from the horrible intruder. In vain did I watch her; in vain did I strive to comfort her.

"He will not let me be at peace," she said; "he comes between us, Hector. He is standing between us now. I can see his face with the red mark upon it plainer than I see yours."

One fair moonlight night, when we were together in a mountain village in the Tyrol, my wife cast herself at my feet, and told me she was the worst and vilest of women.

"I have confessed all to my director," she said; "from the first I have not hidden my sin from Heaven. But I feel that death is near me; and before I die I would fain reveal my sin to you."

"What sin, my sweet one?"

"When first the stranger came to me in the forest, his presence bewildered and distressed me, and I shrank from him as from something strange and terrible. He came again and again; by and by I found myself thinking of him, and watching for his coming. His image haunted me perpetually; I strove in vain to shut his face out of my mind. Then followed an interval in which I did not see him; and, to my shame and anguish, I found that life seemed dreary and desolate without him. After that came the time in which he haunted the pleasaunce; and—O, Hector, kill me if you will, for I deserve no mercy at your hands!—I grew in those days to count the hours that must elapse before his coming, to take no pleasure save in the sight of that pale face with the red brand upon it. He plucked all old familiar joys out of my heart, and left in it but one weird unholy pleasure—the delight of his presence. For a year I have lived but to see him. And now curse me, Hector; for this is my sin. Whether it comes of the baseness of my own heart, or is the work of witchcraft, I know not; but I know that I have striven against this wickedness in vain."

I took my wife to my breast, and forgave her. In sooth, what had I to forgive? Was the fatality that overshadowed us any work of hers? On the next night she died, with her hand in mine; and at the very last she told me, sobbing and affrighted, that *he* was by her side.

HOW I HEARD MY OWN WILL READ

It was wrong to be led away by Scavenger. Scavenger was the third favourite for the St. Leger; and a sporting prophet of some celebrity, Mr. Mooney Dooem, of Little Hocus-street, London-road, Manchester, assured me, for the moderate consideration of three shillings and sixpence in postage stamps, that if I wanted to do a good thing for myself, the way to set about it was to back Scavenger with all the loose cash I could lay my hands on.

Now, I am not a sporting man, and I don't know much of horse-flesh. If I had met Scavenger drawing a parcels-delivery van, my sense of the fitness of things would not have been jarred by the circumstance; nevertheless, I like a race. Yes, I am passionately devoted to a race. I make a point of taking Mrs. Pettifer to Epsom and Hampton races every spring. I like champagne and lobster-salad. I like to wear a green veil, and to talk to admiring servant-girls at open windows on the dusty road. I used to like chaffing the toll-keeper—one feels *so* witty in a barouche and pair. I like having my fortune told. I like coming home in the evening with my mind in a pleasing state of uncertainty as to whether it is the day before yesterday or the day after to-morrow; and I like finishing the evening with iced punch, another lobster, and a "frienly rub-r-r-r."

So I backed Scavenger. On Saturday I gave six to five on him, on Monday I gave five to four on him, and on Tuesday my partner Peck (Peck and Pettifer, solicitors, Gray's-inn) made me give him seven to three on that abominable brute. Peck always backs the field. He is a cautious man, and never means to marry. He makes unpleasant puns about not wanting to be hen-Pecked. I have laughed at that doleful joke so long from sheer habit, that if I heard it in a funeral sermon I believe I should burst into a loud guffaw; and I give you my honour I never thought it funny in the whole course of my life. I am rather afraid of Peck, if the truth must be told, for I think he looks down upon me. I remember once, after a jovial night we had together, going to the office next morning with a labyrinth of streaky red marks all over my face; and when I told him that I had awoke and found the cat walking over my face, he looked as if he didn't believe me.

I backed Scavenger; and then it struck me that as Peck was going down to Doncaster for the St. Leger week, I really ought to go too. I could afford the week's holiday quite as well as Peck, though I was not a single man. So I told Mrs. Pettifer that I must run down to Yorkshire to wait on one of our best clients, who was going to marry his eldest daughter (to somebody else of course), and who required my

professional services for the preparation of the settlements. Now I suppose Yorkshire sounded rather vague, for Mrs. Pettifer asked immediately what part of Yorkshire I was going to. I replied, as immediately, Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey. Now I don't know of any town answering to that name in Yorkshire; but that is no reason there should not be such a place, and I thought the address would be reassuring to Mrs. P.; and so it was. Unfortunately, she wanted me to write it down. I could not have spelt it if you had offered me a million of money; so I told my esteemed Julia Maria that I would write to her the minute I reached Slitherem; and so departed.

That brute Scavenger was nowhere, and my loose cash was jingling in the pockets of the prudent Peck half an hour after the great race. The cup was won by an outsider of obscure lineage, a rawboned chestnut animal with one white fore-leg, which made him look as if he had dressed himself in a hurry and had forgotten to put on his other stocking. Peck had backed him, and came away from the course with his leathern pocket-book distended, as in a dropsy, with bank-notes. I hated him with a deep and undying hatred; but as he asked me to dine with him at the Reindeer, I went.

He is a brute (perhaps I have said that before), but he is, on the whole, a generous brute, and he gave me a very good dinner. They know what a bottle of champagne is at the Reindeer, I can tell you; they can send you up something very creditable in the way of sparkling hock; and if you've a fancy for a bottle of old madeira, such as might rival Captain Cook for sea-voyages, don't be afraid to order it. We had some of that madeira with our fish. We didn't go into "sparkling" till the next course came in; and when we were tired of champagne, we went in for burgundy. I think it was some time in the fourth course that I was rather annoyed by the very peculiar conduct of a partridge. It began by his sliding about my plate, and persistently eluding my fork; he then dipped—yes, this malicious bird absolutely dipped down, plate and all, as if he were taking a sensation header, or going through a trap in the table-cloth. Next he dodged me—yes, dodged me from side to side; concealed himself behind the bread-sauce to avoid my knife; till on my making a final effort to pinion him with my fork, he took to himself wings and flew away—into Peck's shirt-front. I believe this gave rise to high words between Peck and me; but I know we afterwards shook hands; and there was something so really touching in our reconciliation that I wept. It was foolish of me to wipe my eyes upon my dinner-napkin, because I thereby introduced foreign particles in the way of crumbs and mustard into those optics, which injured my sight for the rest of the evening; but Peck said my conduct did equal honour to my head and my heart. I think it was in the course of a speech he said this; and I believe he paid me some very high compliments on my professional capacity and unblemished integrity. I felt grateful to him, though he pronounced it "*feshnl cpcty*" and "*nblmshed*

tgrity," and I didn't quite catch his meaning. This, of course, was after the cloth was removed, and we were taking our port and walnuts.

I don't know what brought Julia Maria (Mrs. Pettifer) so vividly to my recollection at this time, but the image of that injured woman did recur to me, and my feelings got the better of me. I had not acted well towards the wife of my bosom. I had not kept my promise; I had never written to her from Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey; partly because I had not been there, and partly because I did not believe there was any place of that name in the map of England.

How we came to think about the theatre, I don't know; perhaps it was because we had received a circular from the manager of that place of entertainment, perhaps it was the landlord who suggested the idea, perhaps it was the waiter; at any rate there was Peck standing with his back to the fireplace (O, what had he been doing to himself to make himself so indistinct and undulating?)—there was Peck, looking at his watch and saying that it was only half-past nine, and that we might as well go and look in at the theatre.

I don't know whether earthquakes are indigenous to Doncaster, but that town was certainly agitated by some convulsion of nature on this particular evening; and as the inhabitants appeared quite undisturbed by the phenomenon, I conclude that it was quite a common occurrence.

As to that man who told us the nearest way to the theatre, I hope he may come to an untimely end. Nearest way indeed! "Bear to your left down the street opposite, and then turn sharp round the first corner you come to, into a narrow lane." I did bear to my left, whereby I bore right into a horse's mouth, and received a torrent of abuse from a stable-boy riding the quadruped. The lad had been drinking—they will do it at these times!—so I forgave him. Then, as to turning sharp round the corner, did I not turn sharp round the corner, and did I not do the bridge of my nose a serious injury against the brickwork of the corner house? I have never quite understood how we ultimately made our way into the theatre; but I think it was side-ways, because I know something seemed to be taking me into the Market-place, which, as every body knows, is adjacent to that building. Peck took me into a box near the stage. Peck is a play-going man, quotes Shakespeare and Maddison Morton in his conversation. I take my family to see the pantomimes every Christmas; beyond that I am not a connoisseur. The play was *Hildebrand the Avenger, or the Spectre of the Mount.* Peck said it was trash; I thought it interesting. Mrs. Hildebrand was a widow, Hildebrand having been murdered at some remote period. She wore black-cotton velvet, ornamented with spiky embellishments in crochet-work. I knew it was *cotton* velvet, because it looked brown, and clung around her queenly form as she walked. She also wore pearls in her hair—the correct costume I daresay of widows in the time of Hildebrand the A. She was rather a big woman, and she might have been younger; but she was a model of conjugal propriety; and O,

didn't she annihilate Hildebrand's bad brother in yellow boots, when he revealed a guilty passion which he had chee-yerished—he pronounced it "chee-yerished"—for a space of some ten or twenty years! Now I should have enjoyed this dramatic entertainment very much,—for I felt a strong interest in the female Hildebrand, and I rather admired Yellow-boots, though he was a consummate villain, and had three supernumerary consummate villains, dressed in green baize and bluchers, always ready to carry out any scheme of a criminal description,—but there was a virtuous steward, who talked a great deal more than any body else, and who seemed to obtain all the applause. I don't know how he came to be connected with the partridge that had so aggravated me at dinner; but he—the virtuous steward—was nearly related to that malignant bird, and from the moment he spied me in the corner of the boxes, he made a dead-set at me. Yes, at me! The abominable and abusive language he used, I shall never forget. O, ah! he might pretend he meant it for Yellow-boots (the noble-er Count-er, as he called him); but when he said that "the man who didn't do so and so deserved the most ignominious treatment," it was at me he levelled his denunciations, and I felt myself the focus of a whole houseful of indignant eyes. I told Peck of this fact, but he said he had not observed it. Peck never observes anything. I asked my partner if there was anything in my appearance calculated to attract the attention of that obnoxious steward; and P. said I did look rather pale. Suppose I did; was that the virtuous steward's business or mine, pray? and was I to ask *his* permission before I turned pale? I felt pale, and I rather fancied I looked interesting: that black ballet-girl with the eyes—I mean that ballet-girl with the black eyes—thought so, to judge by the way she stared at me. Well now, who do you suppose that virtuous steward was? The most experienced playgoer would have failed to fathom that secret. That virtuous steward was Hildebrand himself, who had been cleaning his own plate in his own butler's pantry, and waiting on his own wife, and depriving himself of all the comforts and privileges of his station for ten years; for the sake of keeping his eye on Yellow-boots, who had intended to murder him, but had foolishly intrusted the carrying out of the business to one of the supernumerary villains, who had evidently made a regular fiasco of it. Now, was not that idea charmingly original? I'm sure, when the virtuous steward threw off a white beard and a black cloak (how ever did he clean his plate or draw his corks in that cloak?), you might have heard a pin drop. I did distinctly hear the wire springs of the beard when it fell on the stage. And then there was such a burst of applause! And then poor Yellow-boots (he was a handsome young man, and would have been graceful if he had only been more settled in his ideas as to what he should do with his arms) was led away by his own minions, with a view to instantaneous execution. Perhaps he had been behindhand with their wages, for they really seemed glad to do it.

How ever it came about, I don't know; but all of a sudden we were behind the scenes. It was very dark, and there were a good many stairs, and somebody tumbled down, and I hurt myself. Peck knew the manager; and it was by some occult and back-stairs influence on the part of Peck that we had gained admittance to those sacred precincts. And there was Yellow-boots dressed in the costume of private life, smoking a meerschaum-pipe, and playing dominoes with the virtuous steward. My first impulse was to strangle the V.S., on account of those abusive remarks he had made about me; but Peck said I had better not; and then I found that I actually had a strong feeling of friendship for the V.S., and that I should respect and admire him to my dying day.

I think presently the manager wanted to turn me out, because I was something that began with a *d*, and disorderly. I knew that I was a model of gentlemanly propriety, and that the remark was the emanation of an envious mind; so I did not resent it. But Peck told the manager I was a jolly good fellow, and as quiet as a lamb when I was something that began with an *s*; and he invited the manager to come and sup with us at the Reindeer, which the manager consented to do.

They gave us a spatch-cock and curried lobster for supper; and this time we tried the sparkling moselle, quite a lady's wine, and not the sort of stuff to get into your head, especially if you laid a good foundation of old dry sherry and bitter beer, as I did. Wasn't that manager a glorious fellow too? And couldn't he sing a comic song too? And did not Peck and I join in the chorus? O, it was such a song! There were seven murders and nine ghosts in it; and really, though you were ready to expire with laughing while you heard it sung, it was not the sort of thing to think of afterwards when you found yourself alone in the dark.

After supper I proposed the manager, with all the honours; and the manager proposed Peck and me, with all the honours; and we drank the theatrical profession, out of compliment to the manager; and the manager proposed the law, out of compliment to Peck and me. Did he not make a witty speech about landsharks and bilge water? I believe it was extracted from the drama of *Black-eyed Susan;* but the manager passed it off as original. And then Peck returned thanks in a speech that was positively affecting; and then we drank the ladies—not that there were any present, but the fair sex in general; Peck said, the black-eyed ballet-girl in particular: but of course Peck is a single man. And then we went to the station.

Yes, we went to the station, though I don't particularly remember *how* we went. We had been to bed, of course, because it was six o'clock to-morrow morning, and there we were at the station. We might have had a cab, or we might have walked down and carried our carpet-bags ourselves—I can't say which; but I am ready to make an affidavit that it was six o'clock A.M., and there we were on the

platform. How that clerk we took our tickets from came to be my second cousin Mary Jane Thomas's husband, who died when I was a little boy, I don't know; but Mary Jane T.'s husband he was; and what's more, I was not in the least surprised to see him. Neither did I perceive anything incongruous in the conduct of the manager, though, on my turning round to wish him good-bye, he all at once grew so like my great aunt Storkins—Aunt Storkins was in trade once, and no Pettifer ever would notice anybody connected with trade—that I could have taken him for that elderly individual, if I had not known all the time that he was the manager as well.

Talk of a long journey! I conclude we went express, because we didn't stop anywhere; but, upon my honour, it seemed to me as if we began that journey in the period of the old red sandstone, and didn't reach our destination till the reign of Queen Victoria. *Eons* and *eons* seemed to pass away, and still that Wandering Jew of an express-train tore onward on its interminable course; and there was Peck sitting opposite me eating sandwiches the whole time. He wasn't always Peck, by the bye; sometimes he was Earl Russell; once he was the Emperor Nero, with a faint tinge of Mr. Alfred Tennyson; but there was an under-current of himself perceptible all the time.

How we came to pass Bagdad I don't know, unless it was through the stupidity of the engine-driver; but I remember somebody pointing to a city which seemed to be constructed of brick-and-mortar pepper-boxes and fish-sauce bottles with tall stoppers, and which Peck declared to be that ancient capital of the Saracenic Caliphs. In spite of everything, we reached London by half-past ten A.M.; and before I knew where I was, I found myself opposite my own door, No. 4 Montefiasco-villas, Denmark-hill.

When I say my own door, I am bound to add that at first I could hardly believe it to be my own door; for of all the stylish funerals I ever remembered seeing, the most stylish was just starting from No. 4 Montefiasco-villas. Such ponderous mutes! I knew the grief depicted in their rubicund faces could not have cost a trifle. Such feathers! I clung convulsively to the palings, for my thoughts reverted to Julia Maria. I remembered the guilty deception which had attended my departure from home, and I felt a conscience-stricken man.

Our parlour-maid Mary was standing at the garden-gate, gaping after the dismal cortège. I gasped out,

"Whose funeral? Not your mistress's?"

"No, sir; master's." Yes; she said it quite distinctly; "master's."

"Stop a minute," I said. "Collect yourself, Mary; you may have been availing yourself of a false key to the cellaret. Calm yourself, my good girl, and try back. Whose funeral?"

"Master's, sir. Fatal collision" (she said "klision") "on the Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey Railroad. Poor Mr. Pettifer brought home on a shutter!"

Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey. The girl had the name of that mysterious vicinity as pat as I have my A B C,—perhaps patter.

I was a little thrown off my moral equilibrium, but I was not going to give way; so I said,

"Don't you know me, Mary?"

The girl stared at me with that vacuous expression peculiar to the lower classes.

"I never saw you before, sir, to my knowledge."

This was too much. I strode past the girl, and up the gravel walk; but she stopped me, and said she didn't think her mistress would see a stranger to-day. I used bad language; I said "Fiddlesticks' ends!" And I went into the house.

She told me, this pert menial, to wipe my shoes on my own mat, that I might not injure my own carpet; and she looked at me, when she showed me into my own drawing-room, very much as if she thought I might mean to purloin some of my own nicknacks.

There was a newspaper on the table. I took it up mechanically. It was the *Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey Chronicle and Monday Morning Advertiser*. Good gracious me! this Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey—a place the very name of which I believed to be an emanation of my own brain, devised to pacify Mrs. Pettifer—seemed to have sprung into life by some mysterious agency, and to have become a flourishing city. The paper was full of advertisements, which plainly showed that Slitherem was a populous place. One column was marked with a long black streak, evidently the work of a soft quill-pen. I read that column. It was a detailed account of the fatal accident on the Dwingey Junction-line, between the stations of Slitherem and Slopeydreggon,—I never invented Slopeydreggon; that place was a frightful reality,—and of the subsequent death of Mr. Augustus Pettifer, solicitor, of Gray's-inn, from injuries received therein.

Yes; there were the full particulars. The engine had run off the bank, and I, with several other passengers, had been precipitated into a field at some distance from the railroad, fearfully mutilated. Fearfully mutilated! Yes; that was the expression.

The door opened, and admitted Julia Maria Pettifer, in tears and a widow's cap. In mourning for *me!* Things were really growing unpleasant. "Julia Maria!" I was about to exclaim; but I had scarcely enunciated the J before she interrupted me by burying her face in her pocket-handkerchief with a sound as of choking.

I felt very awkward; here was I expected to console my own wife for my own loss. After an embarrassing pause of some moments, Julia Maria emerged from behind the pocket-handkerchief. I don't know what she had been doing, but her eyes were not at all red. I took a note of that.

"Ah, sir," she said, "you perhaps were a friend of the dear departed."

Well, I flattered myself I was.

"But," I ejaculated, "Ju—"

She stopped me short at the Ju.

"In that case," she said, "I am sorry you did not arrive in time to attend the funeral. There was a vacant place in one of the carriages. Mr. Spivins had the toothache, and couldn't come."

O, Spivins had the toothache, had he! and it was too much trouble to attend my funeral! I took another note of Spivins's toothache—I had lent Spivins money.

"But as you were a friend of the dear departed, you may like to hear the will read," continued my wife. "It will be read in the dining-room at one o'clock. You would perhaps wish to be present; you may be interested." Having said which, she went back into the pocket-handkerchief and out of the room.

Now what did it all mean? That was the question I put to myself. What did it all mean? Could it be possible that any impostor had had the impertinence to be killed on the Dwingey Junction in my name, brought home to my house on a shutter, and had even carried his audacity so far as to go and be buried in my coffin in my family vault in Norwood-cemetery? I had been induced to purchase a family vault by Julia Maria, though really I had thought it a foolish investment, because of course if I died, somebody must bury me, or if they did not choose to go to that expense, it would be *their* look-out.

One thing may strike the reader as rather singular,—it struck me in that light myself,—namely, that I didn't explain myself; that I didn't say to Julia Maria, "Take off that widow's cap, and put that absurd handkerchief in your pocket, and draw the blinds up. For this is me; and I never went to Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey in my life, and consequently never came home on a shutter;" and so on. The fact is, that I was continually trying to say these very words, and I continually couldn't. This failure I attributed to two causes. First, the pain at my chest—O, such a pain—a weight, an oppression! I don't suppose any body ever had an Atlas omnibus, full inside and out, settled on their lungs; but only a person who had laboured under such a disease could form a just estimate of my sensations. Secondly, really, what with the parlour-maid's asseverations, Julia Maria's mourning, and the graphic account of the accident in the newspaper, I was in a manner beginning to believe in Slitherem-on-the-Dwingey. Suppose I had been killed? Suppose I had been brought home on a shutter, and didn't know it? There was an awful situation!

I pinched myself; it was painful. There was a fire in the grate; I laid hold of the bars; that was painful, very, and I believe I swore; but O, it was such a comfort to feel that I was mortal, that I could have blessed anybody for treading upon my pet corn.

It was a nice thing to be asked into my own dining-room to hear my own will read. There was Peck, in a suit of black, with ebony death's-heads for studs,—he always had a playful fancy,—sitting in

one of my morocco chairs at the top of my patent telescopic dining-table. He seemed to have forgotten all about Doncaster. I tried to recall it to his recollection, but a temporary paralysis of the vocal organs prevented me.

I suppose our dining-room must have been built on some newly-invented expanding principle, because it certainly was *not* as large as Exeter-hall when I left home; and in the matter of cubic feet it decidedly had the advantage of that edifice now.

It was really edifying to sit and hear how I had disposed of my property. There was a picture I rather prided myself upon—a Titian, a genuine Titian. The man I bought it from said it was, and of course he ought to know. Now, I had bequeathed this picture to Peck; Peck was not a bad fellow on the whole, and had stood my friend once or twice with Julia Maria after our Masonic dinner in Great Queen-street; and what do you think was Peck's remark on reading the passage in my will which made him possessor of this gem? "Poor fellow!" he said; "I appreciate his kind feeling; but he wouldn't have known a Reynolds from a Morland, and he always considered Michael Angelo and Buonarotti two distinct artists. The thing is the vilest daub that ever came out of Wardour-street." I tried to express my indignation, but another touch of paralysis was too much for me, and I took another note. Peck—daub—Wardour-street. I had learnt Beniowski's system of artificial memory, and I checked off those three heads on the fire-irons.

After the will was read, we all gathered round the fire, and we really became quite sociable. Mary the parlour-maid brought in a tray of decanters. Didn't the wine go to work!—my '48 port in particular. I don't know who it was that suggested smoking; but we all looked at each other; and presently some one—I think it was Peck—said there was a box of poor Pettifer's cheroots in the side-board drawer, and as it wasn't likely *he* would ever smoke them, we might as well blow a cloud. And so there was I, thanking Peck for one of my own cigars.

Our conversation was very melancholy at first; but presently we became a little more resigned; afterwards we grew quite cheerful; and at last, upon my word, we were almost uproarious. Peck told one of his best stories. I knew it by heart, and I laughed in the wrong place, and he scowled at me. I did it on purpose. Ha, ha! that vengeance at least was within my power.

It was very pleasant, too, to be taken by the button and told a good story about myself, the point of which was, that I had made a consummate fool of myself; and I think if Peck told me one such story, he told me six; and what's more, I laughed—yes, I actually laughed.

I think it was Peck proposed that as we'd had a very melancholy morning, we should run down to Greenwich and take a bit of dinner at the Crown and Sceptre—of course in a quiet way. "We shall find

plenty of hansoms at Camberwell-green," said Peck; and off we went.

Now, when I say off we went, I mean to say off *they* went, for I did not go; and yet I wanted to go, and yet I kept continually trying to go, and yet I continually seemed to be going; but go I did not. Go I did not; for the substantial macadam of Denmark-hill transformed itself all in a moment into the airy nothingness of the Goodwin-sands, and I felt myself suddenly going down, down, down into a fathomless gulf, like another Edgar Ravenswood.

Two broken wine-glasses, a plate of oyster and lobster shells, a play-bill, a candlestick, and my boots! When I opened my eyes at the bottom of the fathomless gulf, these were the articles which met my bewildered gaze. They were on the table above my head; my feet were in the boots, and I was lying on the floor of that apartment in the Reindeer in which Peck, the manager, and I had partaken of supper prior to my hearing my own will read. I was lying on my back on the floor, with my feet on the table above me; and that is not a pleasant attitude in which to abandon oneself to slumber. I had one cork-screw, two balance-handle knives, and the neck of a champagne-bottle exactly under the small of my back. Those trifles did not add to the comfort of my position; and when I tell you that my head was against a sharp corner of the fender, and that I found the heel of the manager's varnished boot planted upon my chest, you will not perhaps wonder that I had assisted at the reading of my own will.

Yes, it had been only a hideous dream, after all; and there was the manager, asleep in an easy-chair, with my chest for a footstool, and looking quite aggravatingly comfortable. There was Peck too in another easy-chair, with a pocket-handkerchief over his face, looking still more aggravatingly comfortable. We had a splendid breakfast, plenty of soda-water and green tea, and started (it really was to-morrow) by the afternoon express-train; and at eight o'clock in the evening I was seated before the social board, quaffing with Mrs. Pettifer the cup that cheers and does not do the other thing, in the sacred shelter of my own home.

I told her a good deal, if I did not tell her exactly all; and never again, Julia Maria, never again! No more Slitherem-on-the-Dwingeys, no more St. Leger stakes, no more Scavengers, no more Reindeers, and no more last wills and testaments. No; we will go to Epsom in the spring-time of the coming year, and hob and nob out of our modest bottle of moselle, as a steady married couple should do.

But, dream or no dream, I mean to revenge myself upon Peck for his impertinence about that picture.

THE GHOST'S SUMMONS

BY ADA BUISSON

"WANTED, sir—a patient."

It was in the early days of my professional career, when patients were scarce and fees scarcer; and though I was in the act of sitting down to my chop, and had promised myself a glass of steaming punch afterwards, in honour of the Christmas season, I hurried instantly into my surgery.

I entered briskly; but no sooner did I catch sight of the figure standing leaning against the counter than I started back with a strange feeling of horror which for the life of me I could not comprehend.

Never shall I forget the ghastliness of that face—the white horror stamped upon every feature—the agony which seemed to sink the very eyes beneath the contracted brows; it was awful to me to behold, accustomed as I was to scenes of terror.

"You seek advice," I began, with some hesitation.

"No; I am not ill."

"You require then—"

"Hush!" he interrupted, approaching more nearly, and dropping his already low murmur to a mere whisper. "I believe you are not rich. Would you be willing to earn a thousand pounds?"

A thousand pounds! His words seemed to burn my very ears.

"I should be thankful, if I could do so honestly," I replied with dignity. "What is the service required of me?"

A peculiar look of intense horror passed over the white face before me; but the blue-black lips answered firmly, "To attend a death-bed."

"A thousand pounds to attend a death-bed! Where am I to go, then?—whose is it?"

"*Mine.*"

The voice in which this was said sounded so hollow and distant, that involuntarily I shrank back. "Yours! What nonsense! You are not a dying man. You are pale, but you appear perfectly healthy. You—"

"Hush!" he interrupted; "I know all this. You cannot be more convinced of my physical health than I am myself; yet I know that before the clock tolls the first hour after midnight I shall be a dead man."

"But—"

He shuddered slightly; but stretching out his hand commandingly, motioned me to be silent. "I am but too well informed of what I affirm," he said quietly; "I have received a mysterious summons from the dead. No mortal aid can avail me. I am as doomed as the wretch on whom the judge has passed sentence. I do not come either to seek your advice or to argue the matter with you, but simply to buy your

services. I offer you a thousand pounds to pass the night in my chamber, and witness the scene which takes place. The sum may appear to you extravagant. But I have no further need to count the cost of any gratification; and the spectacle you will have to witness is no common sight of horror."

The words, strange as they were, were spoken calmly enough; but as the last sentence dropped slowly from the livid lips, an expression of such wild horror again passed over the stranger's face, that, in spite of the immense fee, I hesitated to answer.

"You fear to trust to the promise of a dead man! See here, and be convinced," he exclaimed eagerly; and the next instant, on the counter between us lay a parchment document; and following the indication of that white muscular hand, I read the words, "And to Mr. Frederick Read, of 14 High-street, Alton, I bequeath the sum of one thousand pounds for certain service rendered to me."

"I have had that will drawn up within the last twenty-four hours, and I signed it an hour ago, in the presence of competent witnesses. I am prepared, you see. Now, do you accept my offer, or not?"

My answer was to walk across the room and take down my hat, and then lock the door of the surgery communicating with the house.

* * * * * *

It was a dark, icy-cold night, and somehow the courage and determination which the sight of my own name in connection with a thousand pounds had given me, flagged considerably as I found myself hurried along through the silent darkness by a man whose death-bed I was about to attend.

He was grimly silent; but as his hand touched mine, in spite of the frost, it felt like a burning coal.

On we went—tramp, tramp, through the snow—on, on, till even I grew weary, and at length on my appalled ear struck the chimes of a church-clock; whilst close at hand I distinguished the snowy hillocks of a churchyard.

Heavens! was this awful scene of which I was to be the witness to take place veritably amongst the dead?

"Eleven," groaned the doomed man. "Gracious God! but two hours more, and that ghostly messenger will bring the summons. Come, come; for mercy's sake, let us hasten."

There was but a short road separating us now from a wall which surrounded a large mansion, and along this we hastened until we reached a small door.

Passing through this, in a few minutes we were stealthily ascending the private staircase to a splendidly-furnished apartment, which left no doubt of the wealth of its owner.

All was intensely silent, however, through the house; and about this room in particular there was a stillness that, as I gazed around, struck me as almost ghastly.

My companion glanced at the clock on the mantelshelf, and sank into a large chair by the side of the fire with a shudder. "Only an hour and a half longer," he muttered. "Great heaven! I thought I had more fortitude. This horror unmans me." Then, in a fiercer tone, and clutching my arm, he added, "Ha! you mock me, you think me mad; but wait till you see—wait till you see!"

I put my hand on his wrist; for there was now a fever in his sunken eyes which checked the superstitious chill which had been gathering over me, and made me hope that, after all, my first suspicion was correct, and that my patient was but the victim of some fearful hallucination.

"Mock you!" I answered soothingly. "Far from it; I sympathise intensely with you, and would do much to aid you. You require sleep. Lie down, and leave me to watch."

He groaned, but rose, and began throwing off his clothes; and, watching my opportunity, I slipped a sleeping-powder, which I had managed to put in my pocket before leaving the surgery, into the tumbler of claret that stood beside him.

The more I saw, the more I felt convinced that it was the nervous system of my patient which required my attention; and it was with sincere satisfaction I saw him drink the wine, and then stretch himself on the luxurious bed.

"Ha," thought I, as the clock struck twelve, and instead of a groan, the deep breathing of the sleeper sounded through the room; "you won't receive any summons to-night, and I may make myself comfortable."

Noiselessly, therefore, I replenished the fire, poured myself out a large glass of wine, and drawing the curtain so that the firelight should not disturb the sleeper, I put myself in a position to follow his example.

How long I slept I know not, but suddenly I aroused with a start and as ghostly a thrill of horror as ever I remember to have felt in my life.

Something—what, I knew not—seemed near, something nameless, but unutterably awful.

I gazed round.

The fire emitted a faint blue glow, just sufficient to enable me to see that the room was exactly the same as when I fell asleep, but that the long hand of the clock wanted but five minutes of the mysterious hour which was to be the death-moment of the "summoned" man!

Was there anything in it, then?—any truth in the strange story he had told?

The silence was intense.

I could not even hear a breath from the bed; and I was about to rise and approach, when again that awful horror seized me, and at the same moment my eye fell upon the mirror opposite the door, and I saw—

Great heaven! that awful Shape—that ghastly mockery of what had been humanity—was it really a messenger from the buried, quiet dead?

It stood there in visible death-clothes; but the awful face was

ghastly with corruption, and the sunken eyes gleamed forth a green glassy glare which seemed a veritable blast from the infernal fires below.

To move or utter a sound in that hideous presence was impossible; and like a statue I sat and saw that horrid Shape move slowly towards the bed.

What was the awful scene enacted there, I know not. I heard nothing, except a low stifled agonised groan; and I saw the shadow of that ghastly messenger bending over the bed.

Whether it was some dreadful but wordless sentence its breathless lips conveyed as it stood there, I know not; but for an instant the shadow of a claw-like hand, from which the third finger was missing, appeared extended over the doomed man's head; and then, as the clock struck one clear silvery stroke, it fell, and a wild shriek rang through the room—a death-shriek.

I am not given to fainting, but I certainly confess that the next ten minutes of my existence was a cold blank; and even when I did manage to stagger to my feet, I gazed round, vainly endeavouring to understand the chilly horror which still possessed me.

Thank God! the room was rid of that awful presence—I saw that; so, gulping down some wine, I lighted a wax-taper and staggered towards the bed. Ah, how I prayed that, after all, I might have been dreaming, and that my own excited imagination had but conjured up some hideous memory of the dissecting-room!

But one glance was sufficient to answer that.

No! The summons had indeed been given and answered.

I flashed the light over the dead face, swollen, convulsed still with the death-agony; but suddenly I shrank back.

Even as I gazed, the expression of the face seemed to change: the blackness faded into a deathly whiteness; the convulsed features relaxed, and, even as if the victim of that dread apparition still lived, a sad solemn smile stole over the pale lips.

I was intensely horrified, but still I retained sufficient self-consciousness to be struck professionally by such a phenomenon.

Surely there was something more than supernatural agency in all this?

Again I scrutinised the dead face, and even the throat and chest; but, with the exception of a tiny pimple on one temple beneath a cluster of hair, not a mark appeared. To look at the corpse, one would have believed that this man had indeed died by the visitation of God, peacefully, whilst sleeping.

How long I stood there I know not, but time enough to gather my scattered senses and to reflect that, all things considered, my own position would be very unpleasant if I was found thus unexpectedly in the room of the mysteriously dead man.

So, as noiselessly as I could, I made my way out of the house. No one met me on the private staircase; the little door opening into the

road was easily unfastened; and thankful indeed was I to feel again the fresh wintry air as I hurried along that road by the churchyard.

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There was a magnificent funeral soon in that church; and it was said that the young widow of the buried man was inconsolable; and then rumours got abroad of a horrible apparition which had been seen on the night of the death; and it was whispered the young widow was terrified, and insisted upon leaving her splendid mansion.

I was too mystified with the whole affair to risk my reputation by saying what I knew, and I should have allowed my share in it to remain for ever buried in oblivion, had I not suddenly heard that the widow, objecting to many of the legacies in the last will of her husband, intended to dispute it on the score of insanity, and then there gradually arose the rumour of his belief in having received a mysterious summons.

On this I went to the lawyer, and sent a message to the lady, that, as the *last person* who had attended her husband, I undertook to prove his sanity; and I besought her to grant me an interview, in which I would relate as strange and horrible a story as ear had ever heard.

The same evening I received an invitation to go to the mansion.

I was ushered immediately into a splendid room, and there, standing before the fire, was the most dazzlingly beautiful young creature I had ever seen.

She was very small, but exquisitely made; had it not been for the dignity of her carriage, I should have believed her a mere child.

With a stately bow she advanced, but did not speak.

"I come on a strange and painful errand," I began, and then I started, for I happened to glance full into her eyes, and from them down to the small right hand grasping the chair. The *wedding-ring* was on that hand!

"I conclude you are the Mr. Read who requested permission to tell me some absurd ghost-story, and whom my late husband mentions here." And as she spoke she stretched out her left hand towards something—but what I knew not, for my eyes were fixed on that hand.

Horror! White and delicate it might be, but it was shaped like a claw, and the third finger was missing!

One sentence was enough after that. "Madam, all I can tell you is, that the ghost who summoned your husband was marked by a singular deformity. The third finger of the left hand was missing," I said sternly; and the next instant I had left that beautiful sinful presence.

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That will was never disputed. The next morning, too, I received a check for a thousand pounds; and the next news I heard of the widow was, that she had herself seen that awful apparition, and had left the mansion immediately.

THE PORTRAIT'S WARNING

BY H. SAVILE CLARKE

My friends the Mainwarings lived in Gordon-square, London, in the west-central district, and Mr. Mainwaring, a stout gentleman of fifty or thereabouts, was a musician; that is to say, he gave lessons in music, was the author of a number of songs and pianoforte pieces, and a performer of some note on the violoncello. They lived in very good style, as he had some little property in addition to his professional earnings; and the family consisted of father and mother, a lad at school, and a daughter Ellen, who at the time I am writing about had just reached the fascinating age of nineteen.

For myself I was studying medicine, and expected in a few months to pass the College and Hall, and then settle down in a country practice near my father. I had a good many friends in London, but with none was I so intimate as with the Mainwarings; and I must confess that the attractions of Miss Ellen had to answer for a good deal of non-attendance upon lectures, and for my presence in the family circle two or three times a week when I was in town. Mr. Mainwaring was an old friend of my father's, and on that account, and also because I was passionately fond of music, I was a great favourite of the composer's, who used to drag me off to listen to long solos, when I longed to be talking with Ellen, and hearing the more exquisite music of her voice.

It was a pleasant house to visit at, for Mr. Mainwaring knew many literary and artistic celebrities, and was himself a highly cultivated man, and not wholly wrapt up, like some professors of his art, in musical doings and his own compositions. Mrs. Mainwaring was pleasant and motherly; and as for Ellen—it was occupation enough for any man just to sit and look at her. She was rather tall, with dark hair, and eyes that looked at you from under their long lashes in a most bewildering way; she had the sweetest little mouth in the world, and she carried her small head as gracefully as an antique statue.

The house was well furnished, and Mr. Mainwaring had an artistic but rather expensive mania for pictures; and hundreds of them, in oil, water-colours, and chalk, hung about the rooms, and in some of the passages. Of portraits especially he had a great number, not only of historical personages, picked up at various sales, but of his own friends and family, and among them several of himself. I don't like a man having a portrait of himself in his room, especially if it is really well-painted and a good likeness. It always gives me an uncomfortable ghostly feeling, as if he had his *double* in the house, silently watching people from the canvas and endowed equally with himself with life and

understanding. I speak to the man, and then catch myself looking up at the portrait for an answer; or if a thought unfavourable to him crosses my mind for an instant, I always have an uncomfortable feeling that the portrait will know of it. A man with a good likeness of himself on the wall has me, I consider, at a decided disadvantage; it is not exactly two to one, but he is endowed, at least to my fancy, with duplicate characteristics and double powers.

Mr. Mainwaring had one portrait of himself hanging in his drawing-room which I held in especial detestation for this very reason. It was an absurd idea, for the picture was an excellent likeness, by a famous artist, and meritorious as a work of art apart from its merits as a likeness. And yet I could not endure it, although I had never dared to mention my aversion to the family, who were very proud of it; and it hung, as I said before, in the drawing-room, and in a very conspicuous place. I used to catch myself watching it when Mr. Mainwaring was by with a superstitious feeling that it was on the watch, and its presence seemed to cast a shadow over the pleasant room in which it hung. This feeling haunted me from the very first, and I little knew then what terrible reasons I should have for aversion to that portrait, and what a fearful event would make its canvas suggestive of saddest memories for ever.

I often wondered whether Ellen shared this curious and morbid feeling about that particular picture; and I called up my medical experience and reading, to see if I could find any account of persons so affected. Was it nervousness consequent upon a weak state of health? Hardly that, as I was unusually strong, and by no means of a nervous temperament. Hard study might have made me nervous, but I was also a great man for athletic sports and exercises, and so did not overwork myself. There was absolutely nothing to account for my vague horror and dislike of Mr. Mainwaring's portrait, and I tried in every way to dismiss the feeling from my mind, until it was again roused in a manner that I can only regard as supernatural. My story may be difficult to believe, but the truth has been stamped in letters of fire upon my mind; and although I do not profess to explain the appearances I am about to describe, their occurrence is sadly and indubitably true.

I called one day at the house in Gordon-square, and when the door was opened, Mr. Mainwaring, who was in the passage, came rushing up to me with a sheet of music, and said, "My dear Raymond, I am so glad to see you! I've just written such a delicious barcarolle, and you must come upstairs directly and hear me play it."

I of course assented, not without some speculation as to whether Ellen would be in the drawing-room also; but in that I was disappointed, and instead of looking on her dear face, my eyes fell immediately upon that of Mr. Mainwaring's *double*, the hated portrait.

Mr. Mainwaring went to the piano, and I turned my back upon the

picture while he began playing his new composition. It was a beautiful air, quaint and original, with the repose of moonlight in it, and the sound of rippling waters; the song of the gondolier in that "glorious city by the sea," where

> "The sea is in the broad, the narrow streets,
> Ebbing and flowing, and the salt seaweed
> Clings to the marble of her palaces."

As the composer went on playing, wholly occupied by the music, I happened to turn round absently while listening to it, and so came to see the portrait again.

It was lighted up by the sunshine which streamed through the window, and the face looked as if it was covered with blood. I should say more correctly, half the face, the left side of it; and no words can describe the horrible appearance it presented.

I could hardly control myself sufficiently to prevent Mr. Mainwaring noticing my fright; but he happily went on playing unconsciously, and in a few moments I slightly changed my position in the room, and again looked at the portrait.

Once more the painted eyes looked into mine, and the likeness almost seemed to speak; and I saw again the ghastly appearance on the left side of the face, as if it had been severely battered and bruised.

I rubbed my eyes, and tested the perfectly healthy condition of my sight by looking at other things; but whenever they travelled back to the likeness I still saw the left side of the face covered with blood. It was horrible to stand there and look from the living man to the portrait with the terrible appearance; and in a short time I made an excuse and departed. No one saw the appearance but myself, for Mrs. Mainwaring came in just before I left, and called her husband's attention to some flaw in the gilt moulding of the frame; and they both looked at the picture and made no remark upon it.

I hurried from the house with a vague and uncomfortable feeling of alarm in my mind; but I gradually argued myself out of it, and began to believe that I had been deceived by some optical illusion—coloured light from some cause or other falling on the picture, or a refraction from the lustres of the chandelier.

I was very busy for about a week after the occurrence, and had dismissed it wholly from my mind, when one day I found a telegram on my table. It ran as follows:

"Mrs. Mainwaring to Frederick Raymond. Mr. Mainwaring has had a bad accident; please come directly."

I lost no time, of course, in hastening to Gordon-square, and arrived there just as another medical man drew up at the door.

We went upstairs together, and the other doctor must have thought very little of my nerves, for on seeing the patient I started back in alarm.

Mr. Mainwaring was lying on the bed, and the left side of his face was cut and bruised; it was the appearance of the portrait reproduced on the face of the original.

And then I knew that the appearance had been an omen of disaster, and shuddered when I thought of the horrible gift I possessed of being alone able to see it.

Mr. Mainwaring had fallen on a crossing in Holborn, and his head was much hurt. I stifled the feeling of horror his injuries had at first aroused in me, and we proceeded to dress his wounds and make him comfortable; they were happily not serious, and it was soon done.

It was the summer after Mr. Mainwaring's accident, from which he had recovered with no lasting injury to his face, and Ellen Mainwaring had promised to be my wife. I had not in the interval seen any return of the portrait's warning, and I had mentioned the former appearance to no one, not even to Ellen. If it ever came again, it would be time enough, I thought, to take her into my confidence; there was no occasion to alarm her needlessly.

We were sitting together one afternoon, when her father came in to tell me about their plans for going out of town in the autumn, and suggesting that I should, if possible, join them in their seaside quarters. I was trifling with some fancy-work of Ellen's while he was speaking, when, on looking up, my gaze was attracted to the portrait behind him, and once more I saw the horrible appearance, but this time the whole face seemed to be covered with blood, as from some terrible wound.

I must have looked strange and startled, for Mainwaring suddenly said, "Are you ill, Fred? You look very white!—Ellen, get him a glass of sherry; he looks as pale as death."

Ellen manifested great anxiety, and when her father had left the room, she inquired tenderly what was the matter with me, and I resolved to tell her all. But first glancing at the portrait, I saw that with Mr. Mainwaring's departure the appearance had gone too; but I did not doubt that if he came in again it would return.

And then I told Ellen the story of the first appearance, and how it had been followed by her father's accident, and how his face had been disfigured exactly as I had seen the face of the portrait.

She glanced fearfully up at it as she said, "And papa is going to the seaside to look after some lodgings for us! He thinks of going out of town now for a little time; and then late in the autumn again."

"A railway journey!" I said, aghast. "Can't we prevent it?"

"It would be of no use telling him about it at all," she said sorrowfully, "even with the corroboration the first appearance received. He would only laugh at it, and would never think of putting off his journey."

I knew that too well, but I felt at the same time that some disaster was sure to happen whether he went or not.

At last I said, "Ellen, if your father does go next week, I'll go with him; I shall then be at hand if anything does happen to him."

"O no," she said at first; "I am frightened for you too!"

"But the appearance did not concern me," I returned; "so there will be no danger; at least, none of any special kind."

In the end she consented; and when the appointed time came, Mr. Mainwaring and I were speeding out of London in a first-class carriage, and swiftly leaving the city, fast breaking into lines of light, behind us. He was in good spirits, congratulating himself upon having me for a fellow traveller; but it was with difficulty that I could answer him in the same spirit, for the memory of the fatal appearance made me nervous, and filled me with gloomy forebodings.

It was a fine night, and the rapid motion as we whirled along had an exhilarating effect even upon me, depressed as I was. Every small station that we passed, marking a stage in our journey, gave me a sense of relief: my companion had got so far on his way in safety, and might continue so to the end. It was strange, seeing that any accident would probably be of an utterly overwhelming nature, that I had no fear on my own account; but the strong possibility of danger for my friend precluded all idea of it for myself.

We were passing through a deep cutting, so deep that it shut out all sight of the sky, when the carriage in which we were seated began to oscillate fearfully. Suddenly the engine gave three short sharp whistles: I knew what was coming, saw Mainwaring throw himself kneeling on the floor of the carriage,—then came a crash, a deafening noise, and I knew no more.

When I awoke to consciousness, I was lying on the side of the embankment completely jammed into the ruins of the carriage: I heard shrieks and groans on all sides, and men were rushing about with lanterns among the débris of the train.

I was bruised, I felt, from head to foot, but, as I found while I was getting out of the splintered timber, no bones were broken; and I turned to assist those who were in a worse plight than myself.

I moved to do this and to secure a lantern, when my foot caught against something, and a guard coming up at the time said, "You've had a narrow escape, sir; but I see here's another poor fellow dead."

There was no need for him to lower his lantern to the still face. I knew what he had to show me. I had seen it seven days before in a London drawing-room.

Mr. Mainwaring was lying at my feet, and his face was covered with blood, from a frightful cut across the temples.

The warning of the portrait had again come true.

I had been terribly shaken, and I was very ill for weeks after the accident; and poor Mainwaring had long been buried, when I received a note from Ellen. I had not heard anything of them, and had written

once or twice, thinking it strange that none of them had written, and I seized the black-edged envelope eagerly. The note was very short, and ran as follows:

"The portrait told the truth. You must judge me as kindly as you can, but we can never marry. My father's grave lies between us.

ELLEN MAINWARING."

I was still very weak, and had not been out since I was laid up; but within an hour from the time of receiving the letter I stood in the drawing-room in Gordon-square, and had not been there many minutes when Ellen entered. Her black dress startled me for a moment, and then I said, holding out the note,

"I do not forget your great sorrow, Ellen, but am I to believe this?"

"I wrote it," was the reply, and her face was cold and stern.

"But I cannot believe it," I said passionately; "you cannot be so cruel. Heaven knows I would have died in his stead to save you pain."

She shuddered when I spoke, but made no reply.

"Ellen," I said, approaching her, "I had dared to hope that my love might in some measure lighten, when years had gone by, your heavy sorrow. It is my sorrow too. Have you no word for me?"

I drew still nearer, but she made a gesture of aversion, and then said in a constrained and hard voice,

"You have my letter; there is no need for me to say anything."

"No need!" I returned bitterly, "no need for more, when you promised me love, and I believed it true? If any living man had said I should meet with this reception, I would have told him he lied. If I had died, I might have had one kind thought from you; but now you will not speak to me;" and I leant upon the mantelpiece, and hot tears sprang to my eyes as I buried my head in my hands.

When I raised it again she was gone, without a word or sign. I took up the cruel letter and staggered to the door. I hardly knew how I reached home, and again for weeks I was prostrated with a renewed attack of illness, which proved to be brain-fever.

When I recovered, I got appointed surgeon to a whaler, and for three years I heard but little home news, and nothing whatever of the Mainwarings.

At the end of that time I returned home, and with all the old love for Ellen in my heart. I had tried to forget her; I had kept the letter, and tried to steel my heart against her by reading it over, and calling to mind her heartless conduct; but all in vain. I could only remember the charm of her presence in the early days of our love, when I knew her love for me was as fervent as my attachment to her.

The evening after I arrived in London I wandered into Gordon-square, but I found the house shut up, and a placard announcing it to let. I was bitterly disappointed, although I had had no intention of

calling, but a vague hope of seeing Ellen had led me there; and I had to go back to my hotel, feeling very sad and lonely.

I had come into some property by the death of an aunt during my absence, and on calling on her solicitor, who was an old friend of mine, I found it was far more considerable than I had expected; making me, in fact, independent of my profession. Mr. Lee kindly asked me to dinner, and hinted at a small dance afterwards; and as anything was better than moping about in town by myself, I promised to go, and presented myself at his house at the appointed time that evening. We had a very pleasant dinner; Mrs. Lee was kind and chatty, and the daughters lively and good-looking, and very curious about my whaling experiences, which I had to narrate at some length.

Mr. Lee and I sat for some time over our wine, as we had more business matters to discuss, and dancing had commenced when we went upstairs. I declined to dance at first, and sat down alone in a window-seat rather screened by a curtain, and watched the bright figures flitting about. In a little time I heard a request for music, and someone sat down to the piano to play.

I could not see the performer, but after a few masterly chords I was beyond measure astonished to hear poor Mainwaring's barcarolle, the one he had played to me on the day of the first fatal appearance, and which was always associated in my mind with the beginning of my sorrow. I supposed it had been published; and it was evidently a favourite of the lady who was at the piano, for she played it with great feeling and expression.

I bent forward past the curtain till I could see the player; her back was towards me, but a thrill went through me as I recognised something familiar in the pose of the shapely head, the smooth white shoulders, and even in the flowing black drapery.

It was Ellen Mainwaring. No need for her to turn after the final chord, to make me sure of her. No need to show me the face that had been with me in dreams ever since she had left me in my agony, with the cruel letter in my hand. It was Ellen, more beautiful than ever, with added grace and refinement from sorrow; and all my old love came back upon me with a passionate intensity to which my heart had long been a stranger.

How did she come to know the Lees? She had not been acquainted with them in the days when I first knew her: but how thankful I was that I had accepted Mr. Lee's invitation!

When she rose from the piano, Mrs. Lee went up to her and said, "Now, dear, you must be tired; come and sit by me;" and they came and sat down close to my hiding-place. It seemed so strange to be sitting there within a yard of her, and not to have the right to approach her, as in olden times. I could not escape without disturbing them, so I sat still.

Suddenly Mrs. Lee exclaimed, "Dear me, where is Mr. Raymond?

I have never seen him since he came in from the dining-room; I want to make him dance;" and then growing confidential she added, "he is a client of my husband's, Nelly, and as he is young and well-off, I feel it my duty to find him a wife; and if he stays in town long enough, I daresay I shall manage it."

"Who did you say was here?" said Ellen faintly.

"A Mr. Raymond, Fred Raymond; perhaps you never heard of him. I didn't know you before he left England. But what is the matter, Nelly?" she added, seeing Ellen look deadly pale. "My poor child, are you ill?—let me get you some wine or sal-volatile."

"No, thank you, no wine; but I am not very well. I think, if I can find my cousin, I will go home."

"Well, dear, sit where you are," said Mrs. Lee, "and I'll go and bring her."

She bustled off into the next room. I went forward and looked at Ellen. She sat quite still; her face was death-like, and her small white hands were tightly clasped, as if the nails would be forced into the flesh. It was evident she was suffering from some strong emotion. I could not bear to see it, and at the risk of a second repulse, I came forward. She looked up and slightly started.

"May I sit here?" I said, taking Mrs. Lee's vacant chair.

She did not speak, although her lips moved; so I continued:

"I am afraid I startled you, Ellen; but you must believe that I would not have annoyed you by my presence if I had known you would be here to-night. I did not know you knew the Lees; but you must forgive me for not being able to see you without speaking to you."

She still sat with her hands tightly pressed together and her head bent down. I fancied that once more I was to have no answer, so I half-rose and said,

"I am going to leave town to-morrow, so that you need not be afraid of meeting me again."

Still she did not speak, and I rose to go away quite heartbroken. I had prepared myself for this, I thought; but the reality was more than I could bear. I had made a step to go, when I heard her say in a choking voice, "Fred."

I turned immediately, and sat down again, and then, seeing that she was almost overcome, I silently offered her my arm, and we went into a small room off the principal suite.

When we sat down she was sobbing violently, and I did not dare to comfort her till I knew my fate. At last she grew calmer, and I said, "Ellen,—forgive me, but I cannot say Miss Mainwaring,—I do not want to trouble you now, but may I call on Mrs. Mainwaring to-morrow?"

"Mamma!" she almost screamed. "O Fred, didn't you know that mamma—"

And her sobs and black dress told me the rest.

"My darling," I said, "will you forgive me? I ought to have known, —I ought never to have gone away. How you must have suffered!"

"I have, I have," she said through her tears.

"Will you forgive me for going away?" I said, "and—"

"O Fred, don't talk about forgiveness; can you forgive me for my wicked injustice? I was nearly mad when you left me."

In another moment she was in my arms, and a long kiss told our mutual forgiveness.

Three months after that time we were married, Mrs. Lee insisting upon giving the wedding-breakfast, and declaring that the match was entirely of her making, and that it was all nonsense for us to say that we had known each other before.

One fact remains to be stated about the picture which had foretold so much sorrow. On the day of Mrs. Mainwaring's death, which happened very suddenly, it fell down, and striking against a table in its descent, the face of the picture was utterly destroyed. "And so you see, dear," said my wife, "we can never again be frightened by the portrait's warning."

ON THE "SENSATIONAL" IN LITERATURE AND ART

BY GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA

SOCIETY must have a Cry, and what the cry may be does not very much matter, so long as it be cried loudly enough, and in a manner forced down the throats of people who have not wit enough to cry for themselves, but are content to allow others to do the Town Crier's office for them. The Jews of old cried out for Barabbas, and they got him, and much good he did them, it is to be presumed, when Titus came to knock their Temple about their ears. Barabbas, although a robber, may have been what is termed a "popular man," a jovial rascal, a free-handed scoundrel, a kind of Judaical Robin Hood, who, while he despoiled the wealthy Pharisee, or stole Dives' plate, would fling a penny or so to Lazarus, lying with dogs in the gate. Have we not people nowadays who look upon Robin Hood as rather a good fellow than otherwise, a belted earl in disguise, the confounder of hypocrites, the protector of the oppressed, and so forth? Are not the half-mythical adventures of a vagabond, who, if he ever existed, was probably a barbarous and bloodthirsty marauder, still a favourite theme for the romancer's pen and the artist's pencil? It was as logical a thing to admire Barabbas as Robin. Both, no doubt, were essentially "bold" fellows.

We have always been a yelping generation, and we must have our Cry. "*Hierosolyma est perdita!*" roar the Crusaders; and Jerusalem is lost indeed, for a Turkish pasha still holds sway in the Holy City, and the Palestine Exploration Fund are sending round the begging-box with but scant success. "*Moriamur pro rege nostro!*" yell the grandfathers of the Batthyanys and Pulskis, whom within our time Haynau has hanged and Francis Joseph exiled for rebellion. "Give us back our Eleven Days!" screeches the eighteenth century; and in the nineteenth we are laughing at the Russians, who begin their Christmas eleven days after us. "No Popery!" has been a capital cry in its time. By its means Newgate was burnt, and Lord Mansfield's house gutted, and Lord George Gordon went mad; but the Pope is alive and merry at close on eighty year, dipping his nose in the Montefiasconian wine; and the heart of Mr. Whalley is still desolated to think that the unmasking of the confessional does not convert persons of that way of thinking from their sad errors. Are you old enough to remember the "So help me God" speech of H.R.H. the Duke of York, the gentleman who didn't pay his tradesmen, and allowed his mistress to sell commissions in the army? Our fathers had that speech printed in letters of

gold. The Duke was for a time the Protestant Champion, and his blasphemous commonplace became a Cry. At the present day it is of no more account than "Lillibullero." Lillibullero! It is said to have whistled James II. out of three kingdoms. I heard the tune on Boxing-night, adjusted to some comical words in Mr. Blanchard's pantomime at Drury Lane Theatre, and the lady sitting next to me asked if the tune was "Not for Joseph," or "Champagne Charley."

Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, than whom there is not a shrewder man in Europe, invented an admirable Cry in his novel of *Conings by*. It was "Our young Queen and our old Institutions." It did not mean anything in particular; for Queen Victoria could no more help being young in 1838 than her uncle William, just dead, had been able to help being old. As for our "old Institutions," they might have been the stake, or the rack, or the whipping-post, or the Admiralty Droits, or the Exchequer tallies; but the cry sounded well, and saved people the trouble of thinking. Which is all that is wanted in a cry. Had Mr. Disraeli "stumped" the county of Bucks on that "platform," he might have achieved a triumph at High Wycombe, instead of being branded by Daniel O'Connell (than whom no politician ever better understood the value of a senseless Cry) as a "lineal descendant of the Impenitent Thief." But Mr. Disraeli was not a Radical in those days, and more inclined to cry, "Flare up, and join the Union" (a most popular Cry in its time), than "Our young Queen and our old Institutions."

It is erroneously supposed that the downfal of Napoleon the Great was wholly due to the defeat at Waterloo. That the rout at Mont St. Jean had something to do with the hero's collapse is certain; but unprejudiced persons will tell you that his unpopularity in the provinces in 1814-15 was mainly caused by the convenient cry, "*Plus de Droits Réunis!*" The *Droits Réunis* were a kind of consolidated assessed taxes, which the peasantry imagined to be very onerous. The Bourbons changed the name of the impost, and made it ten times more grinding; but the Cry had been deprived of its resonance, and that was something. By 1830 the people had learnt a new Cry, and cried Charles X. to Holyrood with it. The value of a Cry not meaning anything, was very amusingly shown in this same country of France, during the occupation of Paris by the Allies. One *vaudevilliste* wagered with another that he would introduce among the couplets in a farce a stanza of perfect nonsense which should still be accepted as sense, and even become popular. He wrote:

"Non, la valeur n'est pas la vaillance,
Trente revers valent-ils un succès?
La France, quoique ça sera toujours la France,
Et les Français seront toujours Français!"

This magnificent doggrel took the town tremendously. The farce ran a hundred nights, and "Les Français seront toujours Français" passed into a Cry.

And this mention of a dramatic Cry brings me to the immediate theme on which I purpose to discourse. The number of Cries which have been heard in all ages in the history of literature and art would be amazing, did we not remember that artists and men of letters are human, and that humanity must have its howl. It is as the air it breathes. If it have it not, it dies. Now the followers of St. Bernard raise a cry against the followers of Abelard. "Down with the Pagan school!" they vociferate. The "Pagan school" is a good Cry. *Blackwood* gets up a Cry against Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt because they have the misfortune to live at Hampstead or in Tothill-fields. "Down with the Cockney school!" squalls Edinburgh; and the writer of the finest artistic and literary criticisms we possess is termed a "moon-struck idiot;" and the author of *Rimini* is bidden to "go hang himself in his fetid leather-braces." The "Lakers" had previously had their turn because Wordsworth happened to live at Grassmere, and Coleridge came often to see him. Then the *Courier* tries to put down Cobbett by calling his *Register* "twopenny trash." Old Sergeant William, however, fully appreciated the market-value of a Cry, and taking "Twopenny Trash" as the title of a pamphlet, mauled the *Courier* till it howled again like a cadger under the lash of the beadle. Dr. Southey, having been laughed at by Lord Byron, thought utterly to crush that noble poet by calling him the chief of the "Satanic school;" and virtuous papas and mammas all over the kingdom sternly resolved not to allow their daughters to read "Satanic poetry." But nine-tenths of what Southey wrote has passed long since into "the portion of weeds and outworn faces;" and Mr. Murray is still making a very good thing, annually, out of Lord Byron's copyrights.

A sedition, a revolt, a revolution almost, was accomplished in the French Republic of letters by the famous quarrels between the Classicists and the Romanticists. The former, fanatics of the hair-powder and pig-tail school, enthusiastic followers of Delille and Ducis, and Baour-Lormian, of Châteaubriand and Bernardin de St. Pierre, and the Vicomte d'Arlincourt, had on their side the court, the aristocracy, the clergy, and the magistracy. They dispensed places, pensions, commands, official eulogies, fashionable patronage. They kept guard at the portals of the Academy, and in the antechambers of the Tuileries. The chiefs of the Romantic school were young men who did not cut their hair; who dined for twenty-five sous in cheap cook-shops in the Marais; who lived *au cinquième*, and were often unable to pay their rent. They were, in fine, what we call "Bohemians" nowadays: and what an excellent cry is "Bohemianism"! And what a Bohemian was Napoleon Buonaparte the uncle, when he had no boots, and sponged on Talma the actor for a dinner; and Napoleon Buonaparte the nephew, when he lived on the second floor in King-street, St. James's, and flew "kites" of the sixty-per-cent order! What a Bohemian was the editor of the *Quintessential Review*, when he wrote Last Dying Speeches for

Catnach, and breakfasted on a penny-bun and a glass of gin! Among these early Bohemians were such men as Victor Hugo, as Alexander Dumas the elder, as Théophile Gautier, and as Frédéric Soulie. The well-dressed, well-housed, well-pensioned, well-powdered, well-pigtailed Classicists tried to put their opponents down with a Cry. "*A bas les ennemis de la famille!*" they bellowed. The Romanticists were accused of attempts to undermine the social structure, to bring the Ten Commandments into contempt, and to further lawsuits *en séparation de corps et de biens.* In their desperation the Classicists even dug up the corpse of wicked old Voltaire—forgetting, or desiring to forget, how shrilly he had piped "*Ecrasons l'infame!*" a Cry which has generally tended to crush the Crier—and strove to galvanise him as a Conservative classic. At least "Zaïre" was classical; at least "Œdipe" was decorous. They forgot all about "La Pucelle" and "La Raison par Alphabet."

The French Romanticists were not to be put down by a Cry, however vehemently bawled; and "Notre Dame de Paris" and "Ruy Blas," "Christine" and "Les trois Mousquetaires," "Mademoiselle de Maupin" and "Ni jamais ni toujours," passed into the French language, and became part and parcel of it; not to be eradicated therefrom till Rabelais ceases to divert, and Montaigne to delight, and La Fontaine to enchant, and Racine to command, and Bossuet to astound. Classicism—as classicism was understood by the powder-and-pigtail school, who knew no more than a grammar-school gerund-grinder does of the real beauties of ancient literature—died the death, and the latest champion of the Classicists has been compelled to defend his own hypothesis by writing such "Romantic" stories as *Sibylle* and *M. de Camors.*

From the commonwealth of Literature the revolution spread through the empire of Art. There was a tremendously classical school of painting, of which David had been the high-priest. It is true that this man was in early youth a Jacobin, a friend of Robespierre, who had set up his easel at the foot of the guillotine; that he had been driven out of France by the Bourbons at the Restoration as next-door to a regicide; but, although he ended in exile, he was a baron; he was decorated with many orders; he had painted a picture of a coronation. The subjects of most of his other paintings—vilely cold, meagre, chalky, inane, lifeless as they were—had been suggested by "cribs" from the *Iliad* and the *Æneid.* When he had been dead some fifteen years, the red nightcap of the *sans-culotte* was forgotten in the lustre of the baronial coronet, and David was numbered among the respectables. When Delaroche, when Delacroix began to paint their vigorous, breathing pictures,—when the "Death of Elizabeth," the "Princes in the Tower," "Cromwell looking on the body of Charles I.," and "The Massacre of Scio" began to show the French people that there was something more within the scope of high art than "Orestes pursued by the Eumenides," or the "Sacrifice of Iphigenia,"

—the pictorial Classicists raised a doleful Cry. The people who were in love with every gawky Achilles, every hulking Brutus, every Demosthenes swaddled in a wet tablecloth, every Dejanira poising herself on tiptoe, every Orpheus playing on an impossible fiddle, every plagiarism which David and his scholars had perpetrated from the Sistine chapel, or the Loggie and Stanze of the Vatican, looked with horror upon paintings representing real events, and in which the actors were attired in the real costume of the period. They were not even to be consoled by the half classicists—Ingres and Ary Scheffer. At any peril, those pestilent Delaroches and Delacroix must be put down. So they invented a Cry against them, "*A bas l'école des brigands!*"—they shouted, "Down with the bandit school!" The only possible pigtail idea of a brigand was Cacus stealing cows in a Greek helmet and inlaid greaves. Still, the Romantic painters were not to be put down by cries, by detraction, by abuse, by discouragement, by the refusal of government patronage, or otherwise. They had their victory at last, in the Hemicycle of the Ecole des Beaux Arts—in the first places on the "line" in the national collection being awarded to "Romantic" pictures, and in the relegation of the "classic *chefs-d'œuvre*" of David to the obscurest nooks and corners of the Louvre.

May I whisper in the reader's ear that the agitation against "Romanticism" in literature and art in France was an exactly analogous outcry to that with which we are now deafened in England against "Sensationalism"? But ere I take up that Cry of cries, and strive to show what a hollow, windy, worthless ululation it is, I wish to say a few words concerning a Cry as worthless, which immediately preceded it.

Mr. Charles Dickens has enjoyed European, world-wide fame for thirty years. I have watched his career as narrowly as I have watched it admiringly; and I think I have read every line he has written, and have been enabled to trace with sufficient accuracy the successive phases of development through which his genius has passed, the mellowing of his faculties, the chastening of his style, and their gradual culmination into a splendid but sober afternoon of intellect. He is probably, at this moment, the best-known and the most deservedly popular author in the world; and in the very first number of the very next serial in the familiar old green cover which he might publish, we should probably be constrained to admit that there was something—in the way of character or of description—as good as, if not better than, Charles Dickens had ever done before. Yet, having a pretty retentive memory, and having been all my life more or less intimately connected with what are called "literary circles," I can perfectly well recollect that, in the year 1842—and we are now, I take it, in 1868—there was no commoner cry in "polite society" than that "Dickens had written himself out." There used to be a man called Croker, who had something to do with the Admiralty, and didn't know where Russell-square was, and wrote scurrilous articles in the *Quarterly Review*, especially delighting

when it was upon a woman's shoulders that he could lay his dirty lash. You see that a woman is more vascular than a man. You can fetch the blood sooner from her than from us tough brutes, and *she can't hit back again.* This Croker did his best to scarify Lady Morgan; but he himself has been pilloried to deathless infamy by Mr. Disraeli in *Conings by*, and by Mr. Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*. He did almost every conceivable variety of bad and base thing, but he sometimes said a good one. In the first bright dawn of Charles Dickens's fame, Croker observed that the author of *Pickwick* had "gone up like a rocket, but would come down like the stick." This was "sack and sugar" to the charitable souls who were so fond of repeating that "Boz" had "written himself out." "Boz" wrote the *Old Curiosity Shop*, and pending the appearance of his next book the charitable souls reported that he had gone raving mad. He went to America, and the charitable souls put it about that he was dead. He wrote *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and the charitable souls declared that there was "a great falling off in his style." He went to Italy, and the charitable souls hinted that he had pawned his plate to raise funds for the voyage. There was no end to the malice of the charitable souls. *Dombey*, *Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, the *Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *Our Mutual Friend*, were all asserted to be infinitely inferior to their predecessors; but somehow the man went on writing, and enlisting fresh tens of thousands of readers with every new book he wrote. And yet about this time of the New Year the rocket is soaring high over the State of Pennsylvania, and the stick hasn't come down at all, save perhaps in the form of a stick of cheerful disdain, which has hit the charitable souls over the nose badly.

The only wonder is that the charitable souls have failed to discover that among modern "sensational" writers Mr. Charles Dickens is perhaps the most thoroughly, and has been from the very outset of his career the most persistently, "sensational" writer of the age. There is sensation even in *Pickwick:* the "Madman" and the "Stroller's" story, the death of the "Chancery Prisoner," and the episode of the "Queer Client," for example. The *Old Curiosity Shop* is replete with sensation, from the extravagant pilgrimage of Nell and the old man to the death of Quilp. *Barnaby Rudge* begins with the sensation of an undiscovered murder, and ends with the sensation of a triple hanging and a duel *à mort.* In *Nicholas Nickleby* the end of Mr. Ralph Nickleby and the shooting of Lord Frederick Verisopht by Sir Mulberry Hawk are sensational enough to suit the strongest appetite. And the murder of Tigg Montague by Jonas Chuzzlewit; and the mysterious husband of Miss Betsy Trotwood in *David Copperfield;* and the convict millionaire in *Great Expectations;* and the grinding of the "National Razor" in the *Tale of Two Cities;* and Monks's confession, and the murder of Nancy, and the death of Sykes, in *Oliver Twist;* and finally, the spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House;* and the tumbling down

of the house in *Little Dorrit*; and Mr. Carker's death in *Dombey and Son*. Are not all these pure "sensation"?

When the charitable souls had found out that the rocket-and-stick cry was growing stale, they discovered that Mr. Dickens, being a young man with a thoroughly new style, had become the founder of a new school, and that he had for his disciples many young men whose intellects were growing with his growth and strengthening with his strength; although at that necessary distance which should always, in the subordination of mind, separate Master from Scholar. Giulio Romano, in the outset of his career, was the imitative disciple of Rafaelle Sanzio. He was adjudged worthy to fill-in the master's sketches—nay, even to touch upon his works. But Giulio never pretended to reach Rafaelle's height; and, in process of time, he found that he could do something by his own motion and power, and ceased to imitate, and achieved a very sufficing, although less exalted, celebrity as head-master of his own school—the Giulio-Romanesque. Now, among those who sat at the feet of Charles Dickens early in his career was a bright, earnest, active-minded young man named Albert Smith. This very talented writer had become, to a certain extent, imbued with Mr. Dickens's style and spirit, and perhaps with a few of Mr. Dickens's mannerisms; but he addressed himself to the description of many departments of life on which Mr. Dickens had never touched. He was a traveller and a linguist. He had been classically and professionally educated, whereas the Master had enjoyed only the ordinary commercial schooling, and had been brought up to nothing particular until, learning shorthand writing, he gained admission to the gallery of the House of Commons as a newspaper-reporter. All these things told ultimately on the intellectual development of Albert Smith. He ceased after a time to imitate. He felt himself strong enough to work alone. He carved out a path for himself, and pursued it steadily and successfully until the end. But, while he was still *in statu pupillari*, no abuse could be too foul to be lavished on him by the charitable souls. His works were spoken of habitually as the "washings of Dickens's inkstand;" and he was nicknamed "Albata Smith"—a kind of Sheffield substitute for the Pickwickian silver.

When Albert, by his pluck and perseverance, asserted the real *vim* which was in him, the charitable souls became alive to the fact that if their Cry was to hold, it must be fastened on other victims; so, when Mr. Dickens started *Household Words*, and successively gathered round him as contributors such young men as James Hannay, Blanchard Jerrold, Robert Brough, Walter Thornbury, and, later, John Hollingshead, the cry was raised against these gentlemen that they were each and all "slavish imitators of Dickens"—mere clients and convenient men of the great patron. This Cry died out as these young gentlemen grew middle-aged, and found that they could do something for themselves. For a while there was rather a cessation in literary Cries. A temporary

onslaught was made on William Russell when he went to the Crimea, on the score that he wrote "for effect" in lieu of penning despatches in the good old Adjutant-General's-office style; but when it was found that the "flashy letters"—they were called "flashy"—of the Special Correspondent of the *Times* had saved a whole army from destruction, the charitable souls (having relatives who had starved and rotted in the force before Sebastopol) desisted for very shame from barking at his heels. Still it was necessary to have a Cry.

> "Shout, my brother Decamisado;
> Shirtless brother, come shout with me;
> What shall we shout for, what shall we shout for,
> In this year of grace Thirty-three?"

Thus wróte Dr. Maginn. Society experienced a similar want of a shout in '57 or '58, for I take the existing *jödel* to be about ten years old. The charitable souls could make nothing of Mr. Thackeray, though by a side-wind of clamour they tried to get up a Cry against the Cynical school. They could make nothing of Mr. Carlyle, seeing that the Sage of Chelsea had a way with him of getting the head of a libeller into chancery, and pummelling it with scornful words till it was as big as a pumpkin. So they devised a new term, and discovered a new mare's-nest, and told a new lie, and found the realisation of all their wishes in "Sensationalism."

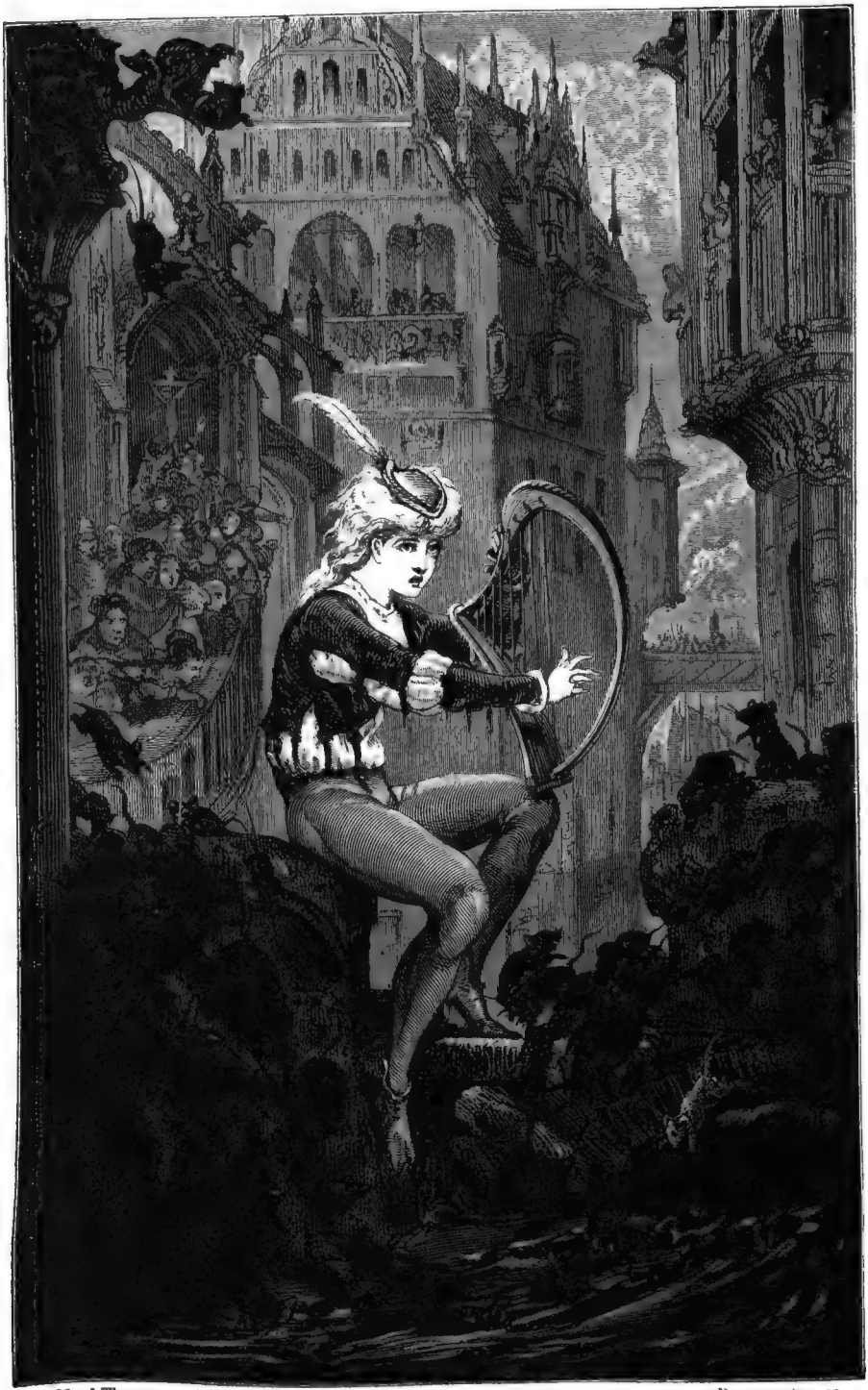
What is Sensationalism, and who is Sensational? I will strive to tell you. The late Mr. William Shakespeare was an arrant sensational writer. He wrote the play of "Macbeth," which is founded mainly on murder and witchcraft. He wrote "Hamlet," in which there are many murders, a suicide, a suspicion of madness, and a ghost. He wrote "Othello," in which there is jealousy, and also murder. He wrote "King Lear," in which you will find murder, blindness, and madness. He wrote "Anthony and Cleopatra," in which these is suicide. He wrote "Julius Cæsar," in which there is murder and a ghost. He wrote "Richard the Third," in which there are no end of murders and no end of ghosts. He wrote "Romeo and Juliet," in which luxuriate poison, murder, and premature interment. He wrote the "Merchant of Venice," in which there is robbery and elopement, and an attempt on the part of a Jew bill-discounter to cut open the stomach of a Christian gentleman. The late M. de Voltaire highly objected to Shakespeare's sensationalism. He called him *un barbare grotesque*. He preferred murder *à la Grecque*, when you only hear the slaughtered Agamemnon groaning behind the scenes. He liked Peloponnesian adultery, Heracleidan seduction, and Attic incest. Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, were not sensational writers. Ben's most sensational play, "The Alchemist," is made up of the humours of a conjuror, a swindler, and a woman of the town. Desdemona is sensational; Doll Common is not so. Beaumont and Fletcher depicted the "humours" of their age with strength, richness, and raciness; they represented the manners of their time with

pliancy, variety, and fidelity; but their plays were plays of Manners, and not of Human Nature. They were plays of Garments, and not of the Life within. So was it with the later comedy-writers. What has become of Etherege's "Love in a Tub," and Wycherley's "Gentleman Dancing-master," and Rowe's "Biter"? Where are Shirley, Vanbrugh, Congreve, and Farquhar? Where is Foote even? There is but one play by Massinger, the "Virgin Martyr," and one by Marlowe, the "Jew of Malta," that has survived almost utter oblivion. They are both "sensational;" that is to say, they treat of Life and Passion. The Elizabethan dramas of Manners are all dead. Who, save bookworms, reads the "Scornful Lady," or the "Custom of the Country," or the "Beggar's Bush," or the "Humorous Lieutenant," or the "Little French Lawyer," or the "Laws of Candy"? Who knows much about "The Fox," or the "New Inn," or the "Staple of News"? Yet the people who wrote these things were cried up by self-conceited wits and sages as infinitely superior to Shakespeare. Have they kept possession of the stage? Will they ever obtain possession of the stage again? Away from bookmen's shelves, the whole rout of them are as dead and gone as a chandler-shopkeeper's ledger of the year before last.

In the opinion of dolts and dullards and envious backbiters, everything is "sensational" that is vivid, and nervous, and forcible, and graphic, and true. There is no sensation in the wretched daubs of Benjamin West, or the heartless tea-tray varnishing of Mengs; but there is most deleterious sensationalism in Fuseli, and Hogarth, and Goya. Miguel de Cervantes wrote sensationally, but Gongora would have scorned the act. Camoens was sensational, but Lousada was "classic." Wedgwood was a sensational potter, and Flaxman a sensational sculptor. The revival of wood-engraving was a "sensation" as bitterly deprecated by the old admirers of namby-pamby stipple and woolly mezzotint, as vaccination was piously denounced by the advocates of inoculation, or better still by letting the smallpox have its own way. The *Grub-street Journal* and the *Daily Intelligencer* were not sensational papers. The *Telegraph*, the *Standard*, and the *Star* are clearly sensational. Mr. Millais is a sensational painter, so is Mr. Holman Hunt. Mr. Woolner is a sensational sculptor; Mr. Ruskin's art-criticisms are sensational; Mr. Darwin is a sensational philosopher; Mr. Fechter is a sensational actor; Mr. Spurgeon is a sensational preacher; Dr. Cumming is a sensational theologian; so, from another point of view, is Dr. Newman; so, from another point, is Professor Maurice. As for Mr. Kingsley, as poet, novelist, parson, and historian, he was always sensational. *Belgravia* is a sensational magazine, and Miss Braddon is a dreadfully sensational novelist. M. Nélaton is a sensational surgeon; M. Edmond About a sensational wit; Napoleon III. a sensational sovereign; and Graf von Bismark a sensational statesman. As for Garibaldi, he was never more than a sensational patriot; and it was only

General Grant's sensational obduracy that caused the Southern Confederacy to collapse.

This is the Cry, this is the yelp, this is the howl, in which the dullards and the dolts and the backbiters revel. Suppose that the sensible portion of society consented just for a season to lay down their arms, their pens, and their pencils, and allowed the non-sensationalists to have their way? No more sensation plays, no more sensation poems—by the way, *Maud* is glaringly sensational, and so is *Enoch Arden*—no more sensation novels, no more sensation leading-articles, no more sensation pictures, no more sensation sermons, no more sensation speeches. Let us go back to the calmly dull, to the tranquilly inane, to the timorously decorous, to the sweetly stupid. Let some new Macaulay—the old one was a sensational historian—take up the narrative left us by Thomas Babington, and write: "Her most gracious Majesty, Queen Anne, was a very good Queen. She was much attached to the Church of England. Her Consort was called Prince George of Denmark. He was a great donkey, and used to get drunk. Queen Anne was very fond of good eating. She was very clever at making cordials. She had a famous general, whose name was Churchill. The French called him Malbrook. He won the battle of Blenheim for her. Queen Anne is dead." There, if that be not classical, I know not what is. There are very few words of more than two syllables in this non-sensational excerpt. Or let our novels be on the model of the *Grand Cyrus* or *Belisarius*. Let leading-articles begin, "They write from Vienna that the Emperor refuses to treat, and that the Great Turk is likely to give some trouble on the Danube." In lieu of reports of debates in Parliament, let us have "Conversations in the Senate of Blefuscu." Let our Royal Academicians turn coach-painters, or cut out profiles in black sticking-plaster; let Mr. Phelps play Macbeth in the uniform of a captain in the Guards; and the Bishop of London, in a wig like a bird's-nest, preach a sermon in St. Paul's against photography and the Electric Telegraph. Don't let us move, don't let us travel, don't let us hear or see anything; but let us write sonnets to Chloe, and play madrigals on the spinet, and dance minuets, and pray to Heaven against Sensationalism, the Pope, the Devil, and the Pretender; and then let Dulness reign triumphant, and Universal Darkness cover all.



Alfred Thompson, del. Pannemaker, sc.

THE STRANGE HARPER

THE STRANGE HARPER

A NEW VERSION

In days of fairy lore and magic wonder
There was a city but by legend known,
Where rats in armies made incessant plunder
Of everything which was not steel or stone.

The pantry-tubs, the corn-bins in the stable,
Were gnawed to shreds to get at meal and oats—
They clomb the stairs and spouts up to the gable,
And all the attic stores went down their throats.

Cupboards and safes were eaten through like butter,
To get at aught which thrift had put away,
And nothing but an iron door or shutter
Could keep a venison-pasty half a day.

There came a youth, his eyes with strange fire gleaming,
Who seemed a farer from a distant land;
His clothes of homely stuff and antique seeming;
A golden harp he carried in his hand.

When with his voice his harp-strings made sweet ringing,
A brighter glory o'er the wide earth flew—
The simplest flow'r he spoke of in his singing
Bloomed ever after with diviner hue.

"O, list to me," he cried; "my song has glamour
To drown the vermin passions of the soul;
Of fiendish cries true song can stay the clamour,
And angels reign, where devils held control.

"The pest obscene which now devours this city
I will make vanish with a simple lay.
I ask no lavish guerdon for my ditty;
Small care has minstrel true for place or pay.

"I only ask to live without dishonour,
To sing the best I can, a minstrel free;
Let others claim the gold of civic honour,
My song itself is meed enough for me."

Burghers, and burgomaster in his ermine,
To council went: "Well, let him try," they cried.
"Go, try," they bade him—"free us from this vermin;
In honour ever then with us abide."

The minstrel seized his harp with eager gladness,
And harping, singing, passed throughout the town:
Where'er he sang the rats were seized with madness,
And ran in wild distraction through the town.

They came without in every street and alley,
Swarming as black as bees within the hive;
Then to the river in tumultuous sally
They rushed, and drowned—not one was left alive.

The burghers blessed themselves with self-laudation—
Shook hands, rang bells—again to council went,
To set on foot some proper celebration,
And vote themselves a feast for this event.

They feasted, drank—the harper quite forgotten,
Until the town-clerk hiccupped o'er his wine,
And wondered where he was; one-half besotten
Said, "With the scullions let the fellow dine!"

'Twas strange, they said, indeed, how the thing ended;
The rats, no doubt, had a contagious fit.
The harper's song helped nothing; some pretended
They knew the man to be not sane of wit.

"His songs," they said, "will only plague and bore us;
An after-dinner song were well enough;
Such as the town-fool sings, while we keep chorus.
Come, town-fool, give us of your good old stuff."

The town-fool sang, the burghers roared with laughter,
Or wineful, at his maudlin and sublime,
Wept maudlinly, and swore that ever after
His songs should live as fresh as in their prime.

After the feast they took to trade and barter—
And business throve: but when that boy they met,
All looked askance, with visage ever tarter;
And wondered why the deuce he stayed there y

An idle loon, they said, that vagrant harper;
They cursed his beauty and his golden locks,
Until the beadle, growing daily sharper,
Threatened at last to lay him in the stocks.

Old cross-grained wives would daily scold and flout him,
And fling him casual crusts into the street;
The children only closely flocked about him,
And kept time to his song with tiny feet.

The winter came, and in a wind-swept attic
The harper sat, neglected and alone;
His lyre no more he struck with thrill ecstatic—
His fingers they were frozen to the bone.

So sat he in unheeded desolation,
Till spring should rouse again his fancies gay,
With sufferance still and barren resignation
Awaiting for the time to fare away.

The primrose rath beneath the beech was glowing,
The dawn was drinking up its sorrow sweet,
As he the harper felt his old fire flowing—
And went and wandered up and down the street.

He played a song so weirdly sweet, entrancing,
The bells of Fairyland seemed then to ring;
Of whisp'ring woods he sang and wavelets glancing—
The murmurs and the magic life of spring.

The children far and near at his first singing
Forgot to roll the hoop or throw the ball,
And from each street in merry crowds came springing,
Drawn on like linnets by the call-bird's call.

He led, they went, through gates and suburb places,
O'er hill, down dale, through woodland haunts, deep, deep
Into the heart of forests, where their traces
Faded as foam fades on the ocean's sleep.

The city men, still scornful of the player,
Said, "Silly children! sure they will come back."
But of that infant army not a strayer
Was found by those who followed in their track.

And other children came in time, but never
Any like those who thus had passed away:
The light of childhood's eyes was quenched for ever,
Its glamour, and its gleesome mirth and play.

These children talked of prices from their cradle;
Their fairy-tales were barter, tare and tret;
They at the christ'ning eyed the silver ladle,
With wizened faces old and serious set.

Rich they became, and richer would be growing,
Until there came a strange and slow decay;
The stream of wealth which through their town was flowing
The hand of progress turned another way.

In mournful, dumb, monotonous decaying,
Not one good thought found ever there a birth,
Till foreign foemen came, enslaving, slaying,
And ploughed that graceless city from the earth.

WILLIAM STIGAND.



Alfred Thompson, del. W. L. Thomas, sc.

LOBSTER'S HAPPY HOME.

THE LADY AND THE LOBSTER

BY ALFRED THOMPSON

Chapter I. The Lobster's Happy Home.

The lobster had a lady in his head! There is no coarse allusion to one of the military when the word 'lobster' is used, though you might think so from the fact of there being a lady in his head. No; the lobster of our tale is an amorous crustacean, whom Cupid has driven out of his element. It was the mermaid found it out. She, dear creature, had no soul, and did not wish to have one by losing her heart to any mortal; and, indeed, she could not understand how any mergirl could be so silly as to fall in love with a poor creature whose extremities were so utterly deprived of finny locomotion, so void of scales that he was horrible to look at, odious to think about. The mermaid was a regular spoilt mermaid, so the turbot said, and Neptune was always sending her some new sea-monster as a pet; but there were none so adored by her as her lobsters were. She doated on lobsters, and this one was her favourite. She used to call it all the sweetest marine names possible: "My sea anemone!" "My Venus anadyomene!" were the least endearing among the many terms of affection used by this mermaid to her shell pet; and it was disgraceful to see the time she wasted (but this was the crab's jealousy) smoothing the lobster's fringes, or combing out the dear thing's feelers. Then she would make rosettes for him of the fairest sea-weed—the very best in greens and pinks which she could possibly obtain; the same, indeed, which she wore herself when she went to the court of the great Neptune, and which had caused so much envy to the youngest of the sirens. The little siren had designs upon a triton, but had not any of the taste in sea-weeds possessed by our mermaiden, and was naturally sea-nettled at the success of her odious rival.

After all, a slave is a slave; and though he may be fed on jelly-fish and pampered with sea-cucumber, he feels more the tyranny of his master than love for his mistress. So, you see, the lobster, though struck with her caprices, was not smitten with her charms. Yet he had a lady in his head, and he knew it; and the conger-eel knew it perfectly well, for he twirled himself into all sorts of shapes with laughter at the idea of a scaly young lobster being in love. And such fun did he (the conger) make of him, that he (the lobster) would blush red, as if he boiled at the insulting ridicule applied by an eel to his pure crustacean affection. And the mermaid knew it too, and did her

best to distract the poor pet, already sufficiently distracted with his own thoughts; and for hours would she take her favourite through the sea-groves and submarine avenues, trying to enliven his sorrowful existence with the sight of all the fun and fright he might create among the ocean-fry; now helping him to nip a sea-horse in the tail; now making the cuttle-fish throw out its sepia wash to form a background for the brilliant colours of the sea anemones and the rosy tints of the corals; now trying to console him by hugging him to her breast, much to the disgust of her servant the *pieuvre*, who felt that if Victor Hugo had made a hero of him, he was at least as desirable as the lobster. But our mergirl never thought for a moment of coming to his arms; besides, he had so many that it would have been most embarrassing; and after all, her love for the lobster was that of a fine lady for her pug, and about as comprehensible. But all this time you want to know who the lady was in the lobster's head. The lobster had been close inshore at Ryde, and it was there he had fallen hopelessly in love with as pretty a girl as you might find from one end of the pier or the period to the other.

Chapter II.

THE CRIME.

The absurd part of the story was that the lady had a lobster in her head. Absurd, but not astonishing; for nowadays, when ladies wear overgrown furze-bushes on their crowns, and add false flowers, factitious fruits, or Brummagem butterflies by way of adornment of the tresses Nature has or has not given them, there would be no great astonishment created if a lady went into a ball-room with a shell-fish coiffure by way of a change. But the lobster was in this lady's head, not on it —absolutely in it. There is no accounting for woman's whims; and everyone knows the proverb, *Ce que femme veut*, &c.—at least, everyone at Ryde, and especially the particular friends of the particular lady in question. There is no necessity to hurt the personal feelers of the lobster family, so we will not individualise; but the lobster shall remain "the lobster," and the lady "the lady," as long as she behaves as such. So the lady had come down to Ryde for her health and the benefit of sea-air and yacht-society; and as all kinds of shell-fish were particularly denied to her by her medical adviser, she, after the manner of her kind, hankered exceedingly after the lobster-pots of Egypt (for Egypt the reader will be good enough to understand Cowes or the Needles), and thus it was that she had a lobster in her head. There was a captain of the Knightsbridge Cohorts who did his best to take the lobster's place in the lady's head, and would probably have done so immediately had her maternal adviser denied her the pleasure of the captain's society; but as the captain was in receipt of dividends amply sufficient for the support of anyone's daughter, the lady's mamma had not forbidden flirtation, and the lobster was still uppermost in the lady's

thoughts. Come what would (and the medical adviser knew perfectly well what would come, as he also adored a devilled claw for supper, and seldom resisted it), she intended on the first opportunity to go in for lobster, and the Knightsbridge centurion was to do his best to assist her in the abduction. There was to be a picnic, of course, as the great attraction, and salad and lobster were to be the staple luxuries provided. Indeed, the lady having hinted to her particular friends that she should *so* like a lobster-salad, every caterer arrived with a batch of white lettuces, and item one lobster.

Must we leave the lady to fill-up the hiatus between her and the lobster? We suppose we must. The lady in the poor creature's head made his eyes start and his brain throb to such an extent that for a moment he thought himself a common cod's-head-and-shoulders, so flabby did he feel, and so unconscious was he of a tail and claws; and in this state he wandered into a lobster-pot, which was soon hauled on board a lugger, and ere he could recover himself he was out of the lobster-into the boiling-pot, and exposed, red and curly, to the vulgar gaze of Ryders both horse and foot. And this is how he arrived at last into the presence of the lady.

The captain was curly and red with running about making preparation for the picnic; it only remained for him to buy his contribution to the dinner in shape of the lobster required; and he was particularly taken with the red and curly specimen lying smoking before him on the fishmonger's slate. A hidden sympathy existed between these two red and curly creatures; they both had the same lady in their heads. So our lobster was bought, and came to the picnic, and the lady was there to receive the incense of her admirers. The incense came up profusely in the shape of salad and shell-fish, the only provisions present; and had it not been for the centurion's foresight in adding a dozen of Moselle and superintending the arrival of corkscrew, cruets, and rolls, the picnic would have been a failure. As it was, there was one elderly lady, who was present on behalf of propriety, who could not be persuaded to look on lobster as wholesome, or lettuces as a substitute for her daily nutriment, which we have been told is two mutton-chops and a roast fowl, with the fluid accompaniments of pale ale and a glass of port negus.

But we have nothing to do at present with any lady but the lobster's lady; and she had already singled out her ocean admirer, made her land adorers acquainted with her choice, and caused the quartering of her desire's object. The execution had been prompt, and the lady who had had the lobster so long in her head was soon taking the most rapid steps to change its apartment. Indeed, the elderly lady who did propriety was heard afterwards to say that she never saw such a repulsive performance: "Actually ate a whole lobster to herself! I expected to see her swallow the claws as well, my dear! I don't wonder at her being ill afterwards." That is what propriety said.

Now you know that the lobster, who would when living have given his right claw to touch the lips of the lady, and would have sworn to defend her every word at the point of his longest feelers, completely disagreed with her after consumption. But this disagreement between the lady and the lobster brings us to our third chapter.

Chapter III.

REMORSE.

The doctor had told her not to eat of the lobster, and Eveline still persisted in doing so. It was not only not a bite, but it approached to gormandising: a sad thing for ink to have such a word to illuminate in connection with anything so ethereal as a lady; but it is a fact. She defied not only her medical adviser, but digestive probability; and so great was the sensuous pleasure she experienced, that she consumed her share, or rather double her share, in half the time taken by any other picnicker present: it was a rapid act of galloping consumption. It might have ended in a galloping consumption for the lady; for she, poor dear, was delicate, and she soon rued the day she had a lobster in her head. The day was hot, the sun had shone during the feed, and the lady felt she was growing white after her feast—not to say green, with just enough red at the tip of the nose and round the eyes to remind her unpleasantly of the lobster. She had the extreme mortification of seeing all her admirers, save one, sidle off gradually to a straw-coloured chignon who had had but small chance before her indisposition of attracting anything but a passing compliment—save one, we said, for Mars in the shape of the captain of the Knightsbridge Cohorts remained faithful to Virgo in spite of her melancholy connection with Scorpio or Cancer, as you may choose to translate the word; Mars remained true and at her side until the lady arrived under the maternal roof, which in this case was lodgings on the Marine-parade at Ryde, where the balcony looks like a veranda half-way up the house. Maternal solicitude broke out in an eruption of sal volatile, sulphuric æther, and other domestic pick-me-ups, followed by an absolute command to the maid to put her young lady to bed. To bed she went, sighing heavily and breathing spiteful things against her first meeting with that horrid lobster. Why had she ever had a lobster in her head?—a nasty, unwholesome, indigestible monster! And now the lobster was no longer in her head, it gave her indescribable twitches of remorse such as she had never before experienced. She thought in the darkness of the night that she wandered near the borders of the sea where the lobster had met with an early grave, and where his remains were still glimmering with a ghostly phosphorescence, which argued the heat of the season or the lateness of his burial. Then of a sudden ghastly visions of everything crustacean surged up in crowds of clawing life around and about her. Flights of weird birds, whose

heads, wings, and tails resolved themselves on inspection into lobsters; strange horsemen in shell-jackets on stranger steeds in scale-armour, which recalled her gluttony of the day before; while a troubadour with lobster-eyes and red repulsive features kept up a dismal twang upon a mandoline which had been formed of the skate-like remains of an electrical ray. Remorse indeed! What would she not have given to be freed from this maniac crowd of torturers! All her observations were in vain. Her prayers for pity were only met with lobster-sauce and insult. She adjured the troubadour, if he believed all the ditties he sang in her honour, to lift a hand in her defence. In vain! no saving claws appeared to alter the will of the avenging sea-nymph.

Chapter IV.

THE PUNISHMENT.

For the mermaid was at the bottom of it all. On, on to the deep sea the clapping, clawing crush of lobster-life hurried her. Somehow or other she had changed her night-dress for a bathing costume, and the cool morning air was playing round her ankles. She looked round for help: no help was near, not even a bathing-woman or a coast-guardsman. She even called on the captain, so red and curly, so Adonis-like now in comparison with the demons who were going to drown her—yes, drown her. The mermaid had decreed it. The mermaid had lost her pet—her own dear gentle lobby—and she had vowed vengeance on the siren who had lured away her favourite to be the victim of her wanton appetite. And now she was in deep water!—water as calm, as tranquil, as silent as the too-oomb! Had she not known how to swim, she would now be gasping out her life in spluttering gulps of brine; had she not loved life and hoped to share it with the Cohorts of Knightsbridge, she would have lost courage and sunk already. But she was strong, she was young, she loved, she would battle for the life that another held dearer than herself. Yet the vengeful sea-girl sneered below as she reclined on the yellow sand among the sea anemones and jelly-fishes; she laughed till the ripples along the coast caught up the sound and told of her vengeance to the elves in the caves; and gently but surely she dragged down the fainting lady, who was now crying for help to the distant bathers. The gulls came and mocked her in her misery, the bathers plunged and made themselves ridiculous, little wotting of the step which separated them from the sublime. The voice grew hoarse; the voice went out like a midnight lamp; the lovely eyelids closed, the lady's head sank out of sight, the hands were clasped one moment—and she awoke! The lady has never had a lobster in her head since; in fact, she has no room there at present, for the captain has taken entire possession of the place.

THE LORELEI

"Flows the Rhine as flowing wine,
Bright in its unrest,
Sweet with odours of the vine;
Heaven in its breast."

So the boatman Hugo sung,
Long, long ago,
By the Lurley-berg that hung
In the sunset glow.

At that fateful rock, upraised
From its foamy base,
Suddenly the boatman gazed
With a stricken face.

On its summit, wondrous fair,
Shining angel-wise,
Sat a maid, with golden hair
And beseeching eyes.

From a shoulder's rosy sphere
All the robe that slid,
Ripple-bright and water-clear,
Rather show'd than hid.

As her hair her fingers through
(Fingers pearly white)
Slowly pass'd, the diamond dew
Fell and broke in light.

But a gold harp from her feet
Lifted she ere long,
And its music, pulsing sweet,
Fed a wondrous song.

And the boatman, drifting fast,
Listen'd to his cost;
On the rocks before him cast!
In the whirlpool lost!

Then the Lorelei's luring form
Faded from the eye,
As a cloud fades, rosy warm,
In a purple sky.

W. S.



Thomas Gray, del. F. Kemplin, sc.

THE LORELAI.

THE GHOSTS OF GLENLUSSA

BY CUTHBERT BEDE, AUTHOR OF "VERDANT GREEN," ETC.

In one of the most romantic parts of the picturesque peninsula of Cantire, South Argyllshire, where the hills rise to a height of eight hundred feet, and command on either side panoramic views of the Atlantic-washed southern Hebrides, and of the ragged peaks of Arran rising up from beyond Kilbrannan Sound, are a series of glens, the haunt not only of wild loveliness, but of wilder traditions. Of one of these glens, named in Gaelic *Alt-na-dubhneach*, or "the Glen of the Black One"—*i.e.* the Devil—I published, in 1865, a story called "The Ghost of the Devil's Glen," which was printed in that volume of romantic, supernatural, and legendary Western-Highland stories, to which I gave the name of *The White Wife*. In the interval that has elapsed since its publication, I have been enabled to collect many other similar legends and traditions, which have been carefully treasured by the Gaelic-speaking natives of Cantire, but which have not as yet been put into print. If they are not now preserved, they would probably expire together with the old manners and customs of the people, and (as it would seem) that ancient language in which they have been orally delivered from generation to generation. In asking for the preservation in the pages of *Belgravia* of some of these legends and tales, I would first crave a small space for the Ghosts of Glenlussa.

The before-named Devil's Glen, which possessed a ghost of its own, was connected with Straduigh Glen, otherwise called *Gleann Strath Duthaich*, or "the Country Glen," where dwelt a certain charmer—of the male sex—who exercised power over fiends, fairies, witches, and warlocks, and whose story I narrated in *The White Wife*. Where this Country Glen makes a sudden bend eastward to the sea, it takes the name of Glenlussa, and is watered by a salmon-stream that flows into Kilbrannan Sound at Ardnacross. In the last century, when it was not necessary to "recruit with the colley dog," and when men, as well as sheep, were plentiful in those glens, Glenlussa furnished its full quota to the volunteer company who fought for "King George upon his throne." It also supplied two local poets, Donald Kelly and Donald M'Lean; and it possessed for an inhabitant that ingenious old lady, who, when her sailor son brought her a pound of tea, in default of knowing what else to do with it, soaked it, pounded it with the potato 'beetle,' mixed it up with milk, butter, and meal, and, when she had eaten it, pronounced it to be "nane sae gude as kale." And there was also another inhabitant of Glenlussa, its laird, Mr. Hector Macallister,

who had married the sister of the Marquis of Argyll. And the story is told of him, that when he refused to help Argyll against his neighbours the Macdonalds, he had to fly from Argyll's threat of vengeance, but was captured with his three sons near to Campbelton. Whereupon his wife rode with great speed to beseech her brother to spare her husband and lads; but Argyll spied her coming, and ordered his men to hang Macallister and his sons on the Whinny Hill. "Which of them shall we put up first?" asked the men. "The whelps; and afterwards the old fox," replied Argyll. And when his sister reached the spot she found the four bodies swinging dead from the gallows, to haunt her from thenceforth as ghosts of Glenlussa.

Some popular stories are still told by the people of Glenlussa in connection with their great festival of Hallowe'en (All Hallow's Eve, October 31); and as that festival is the very time for spells and invocations of spirits, the supernatural, as a matter of course, plays an important part in such stories. I here give two specimens of them, which include the leading customs and superstitions of that Western-Highland district. The ducking for apples, which is so common a custom on Hallowe'en night in Ireland and the north of England—and which forms a leading theme in Maclise's picture—is not mentioned here, nor is it alluded to by Burns in his poem on the subject. He mentions, however, the nut-cracking; as does Gay in his "Spell;" and in the north of England this pastime has given to the festival the name of "Nut-cracking Night." I may also observe that on Hallowe'en the streets of Campbelton are paraded by boys flourishing kail-stocks. And now to my story.

It was Hallowe'en; and the young people in Glenlussa had met to amuse themselves. They had been at the kail-pulling, and worked it in this fashion: when the lads and lassies had been blindfolded, they were made to take each other by the hand and go into the kail-yard and pull out a stock of kail. If the stock was straight or crooked, or sour or sweet in its *custoc* (heart), so would be the shape and temper of the future husband or wife; and if the stock was light or heavy with earth, so would be the money in the purse of the partner. They had played, too, at cracking and burning nuts, to see which pairs of lovers would bide together or start asunder; and the girls had got the oat-stalks to pull for their families, not minding if there were a dozen grains, but taking care to keep the top one on the stalk, lest anyone should say they had tripped. And they had winnowed their three *wechts* of nothing; and eaten the apple before the looking-glass; and held the blue clew-line; and tried in every way to discover their future partners.

When they had tried these and several other games, and had used charms and words in order that they might dream or see something by which they might know their fortune, they got to egg-dropping. Then one of the girls filled her mouth with the water in which the

eggs had been dropped, and went out quickly to run round the house. As she did so, she suddenly met a stranger who was dressed in a soldier's uniform, who said to her "*Am facadh thu Iain?*—did you see John?" The girl was terrified, for she well knew that there was no soldier at that time in Glenlussa; and she darted back into the house, and told what she had seen. Then they all ran out to see the stranger; but no soldier was there; and although they searched everywhere, they were unable to find the person who had spoken to the girl. They then knew it to have been a ghost; and it filled them with such fear that nothing else was talked of in Glenlussa for some weeks to come.

But the winter passed away, and they had other things to think of, and even the young girl had almost forgotten the soldier's ghost, when one day that she had been to town (Campbelton) to market, she saw some soldiers just landing from a ship. They had come all the way from the East Indies, where they had served for some years; and, as they marched up Main-street from the quay, who should be at their head but the very soldier whose ghost had appeared to her on Hallowe'en. He proved to be a cousin of a friend of hers, and so she soon got to know him; and when she found that his name was John, she knew that it was not for nothing that the apparition had appeared to her. He made his proposals to her, and, as he had saved some money, they did not long keep company, but were married and had settled in Glenlussa before the next Hallowe'en.

So ends that story. Here follows a very short one, which also makes the ghosts of Glenlussa to appear on Hallowe'en with matrimonial intentions.

There were two brothers in Glenlussa, and on Hallowe'en they dipped their shirts in a dead-and-living ford (that is, the ford of a stream that had been crossed by a funeral); and, when they went to bed, they left their shirts to dry before a large fire, and kept watch to see who would come. And after they had watched for some time, they saw the figures of two girls coming in and going up to the fire, and apparently turning their shirts, and then vanishing. And before next Hallowe'en the two brothers married those two girls whose apparitions they had seen turning their shirts.

Burns refers to this charm in his song of "Tam Glen," but limits the turning to the sleeve of the shirt, and the wetting of it does not appear to have been done in any special water. In the appendix to Pennant's *Tour* the charm is mentioned as being confined to the sleeve of the left arm, and the dipping of the shirt is ordered to be done in "a burn where three lairds' lands meet" at a "south-running spring or rivulet."

The people in Glenlussa would seem to have suffered from a chronic attack of the supernatural. The three following brief ghost-stories—in which, however, there is little or no point—are still popular in that locality.

Upwards of seventy years ago there lived in Glenlussa a worthy couple named MacKellar. The wife was exceedingly thrifty, and wrought early and late at her spinning-wheel. All the clothes at that time were made at home; and everything that was on her own and her husband's back was made by her own industry. Long after her husband had gone to bed she would sit at her spinning; and as he could not prevail upon her to lie down, he hated the hum of her wheel. One night that she had continued at her work longer than usual, and had been spinning into the early morning, she observed a strange man, dressed in the Highland garb, standing on the floor. She said to him, "*Cea as a thaine thu?*—where did you come from?" He replied, "*Thainig mise a Thireacadan,*—I came from the town of Tireacadan." And looking earnestly at her, he vanished, although the door was shut and fastened. Then she knew him to be a ghost; so the thrifty wife flew into bed behind her husband (*i.e.* next to the wall), and never more troubled him by sitting up late and disturbing him with the hum of her wheel.

This ghost was evidently of much service to Mr. MacKellar, although its conversation was brief and far from terrible. The next ghost of Glenlussa is that of a girl.

There was a certain young man who lived in Glenlussa; and one night, after he had gone to bed, he saw a neighbouring girl, who was well known to him, come to the window and place her face against the glass. He at once got up and ran out to her; but not being able to find her, went back to bed again. No sooner was he in bed than her face again appeared at the glass. He ran out directly; but could not see her. Again he went to bed, and her face appeared at the glass for the third time. Once more he ran out; but no girl could be seen. The next morning he met the girl, and asked her for what she was so late out of bed the last night? Whereupon she affirmed that she had gone early to her bed; and her parents gave him proof that she had done so. Everyone in Glenlussa believed that the young man had seen the girl's spirit.

This story ought to have ended with the marriage or death of the girl, or something equally conclusive; but it is surpassed in pointlessness and lack of dramatic action by the following brief story, which is as popular in Glenlussa as "Jack and Gill" is elsewhere.

There is a well in Glenlussa, and two lads went there at nightfall to draw water. They had finished drawing, and were about to return home, when, of a sudden, something black and awful rose up out of the well, splashing the water and spreading it to a great distance. The two lads ran home greatly alarmed, and gave information to the people in the glen, who at once came and searched the well, but found nothing peculiar about it. It was therefore concluded that the lads had seen something supernatural.

This last ghost of Glenlussa is of the common bogey species. I have

yet one more story to tell of this locality, in which, however, the supernatural portion deals with a dream instead of a ghost.

Between two and three miles north of Kilcouslan, on the eastern coast of Cantire, is a spot called Pinnivers or Peninver, where stood a large block of stone, which was conjectured to have been erected many centuries ago, either in memory of some hero who had been slain in battle, or else for purposes of Druidical worship. Now, there was an Irishman who lived in the northern part of Ireland, and he dreamed a dream, in which was revealed to him this very stone or cairn; and it was shown to him in the vision that there was a great treasure buried underneath the stone. So he left Ireland, and came across the Channel to Southend, and made his way to Campbelton, and on to Peninver, until he had found the place of his dream. It was almost dark when he reached the spot; but he immediately recognised the stone, and found the precise part of it underneath which the treasure was hidden. But as he had no implements with him wherewith he could raise the stone, he betook himself to a smith who lived at the foot of Cnocsca-lopil, where it slides down into Glenlussa. There he begged for a night's lodging; and the smith, seeing that he was a stranger, furnished him with supper and a bed, and also with a glass or two of moonlight (smuggled) whisky. They got very comfortable together over the whisky, and talked now of this thing, now of that. The smith was very desirous to know what had brought the Irishman to Cantire; and although the other had intended to have kept his own counsel, yet the whisky and the canny Scotsman were too many for him, and he told the smith the whole secret from first to last.

"O," says the smith, as though he made nothing of the news, "and is that all? only a dream! Why, I have often and often dreamed about a many fine things, and I always found them nothing more than a delusion and a snare. I do wonder that a sensible man like you should have come so far on such an errand."

"I was thinking, as I came along, that I was a bit of a fool," says the Irishman; "but having come so far, and finding the stone just as it was in my dream, I should not like to go back without digging for the treasure."

"Certainly not, if it will ease your mind," says the smith. "But you may depend upon it, it will not put any siller in your pouch. I have dreamed of buried treasures a score of times; but, with all my digging and dreaming, I never turned up anything but hard stones. But, as you are bent upon it, I will take my tools in the morning and help you in your search."

But no sooner was the Irishman in bed and fast asleep than the smith got up, and rousing his son, they quietly stole off to the cairn, where they dug in the spot that the Irishman had told him of; and there, sure enough, was the hidden treasure. They secured it safely, and filled up the hole that they had made, so that everything looked

undisturbed. Then they got back to their beds, without the Irishman being any the wiser for their proceeding. In the morning he challenged the smith to go with him to look for the treasure; and they went; the smith joking him as they went along, and telling him that he would find nothing but stones and dirt. And, of course, the Irishman found that the smith's words were true; for although they dug and dug, yet not the ghost of any treasure could they find; and the disappointed man returned to Ireland poorer than when he had left his home.

But after he was gone, it was noticed in Glenlussa that the smith and his family, who had been very poor, now began to be prosperous, and were well fed and clad; and when everyone was wondering what could be the reason of the change, the smith took all his family away to America; and nothing more has ever been heard of them. But how the Glenlussa people came to know of the dream and the hidden treasure was in this way: the smith told the secret to his wife, and the wife, just before sailing, told it to a friend, who told it to all in Glenlussa; so that their saying is a true one, "Tell it to a woman, tell it to the town."

J. A. Pasquier, del.

Edmund Evans, sc.

THE CONVIVES OF THE GEORGE AND DRAGON.

THE HAUNTED BARONET

BY J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS,' ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE GEORGE AND DRAGON.

THE pretty little town of Golden Friars—standing by the margin of the lake, hemmed round by an amphitheatre of purple mountain, rich in tint and furrowed by ravines, high in air, when the tall gables and narrow windows of its ancient graystone houses, and the tower of the old church, from which every evening the curfew still rings, show silvery-white in the moonbeams, and the black elms that stand round throw moveless shadows upon the short level grass—is one of the most singular and beautiful sights I have ever seen.

There it rises, 'as from the stroke of the enchanter's wand,' looking so light and filmy, that you could scarcely believe it more than a picture reflected on the thin mist of night.

On such a still summer night the moon shone splendidly upon the front of the George and Dragon, the comfortable graystone inn of Golden Friars, with the grandest specimen of the old inn-sign, perhaps, left in England. It looks right across the lake; the road that skirts its margin running by the steps of the hall-door, opposite to which, at the other side of the road, between two great posts, and framed in a fanciful wrought-iron border splendid with gilding, swings the famous picture of St. George and the Dragon, gorgeous with colour and gold.

In the great room of the George and Dragon, three or four of the old *habitués* of that cozy lounge were refreshing a little after the fatigues of the day.

This is a comfortable chamber, with an oak wainscot; and whenever in summer months the air is sharp enough, as on the present occasion, a fire helped to light it up; which fire, being chiefly wood, made a pleasant broad flicker on panel and ceiling, and yet did not make the room too hot.

On one side sat Doctor Torvey, the doctor of Golden Friars, who knew the weak point of every man in the town, and what medicine agreed with each inhabitant—a fat gentleman, with a jolly laugh and an appetite for all sorts of news, big and little, and who liked a pipe, and made a tumbler of punch at about this hour, with a bit of lemon-peel in it. Beside him sat William Peers, a thin old gentleman, who had lived for more than thirty years in India, and was quiet and benevolent, and the last man in Golden Friars who

wore a pigtail. Old Jack Amerald, an ex-captain of the navy, with his short-stout leg on a chair, and its wooden companion beside it, sipped his grog, and bawled in the old-fashioned navy way, and called his friends his 'hearties.' In the middle, opposite the hearth, sat deaf Tom Hollar, always placid, and smoked his pipe, looking serenely at the fire. And the landlord of the George and Dragon every now and then strutted in, and sat down in the high-backed wooden arm-chair, according to the old-fashioned republican ways of the place, and took his share in the talk gravely, and was heartily welcome.

'And so Sir Bale is coming home at last,' said the Doctor. 'Tell us any more you heard since.'

'Nothing,' answered Richard Turnbull, the host of the George. 'Nothing to speak of; only 'tis certain sure, and so best; the old house won't look so dowly now.'

'Twyne says the estate owes a good capful o' money by this time, hey?' said the Doctor, lowering his voice and winking.

'Weel, they do say he's been nout at dow. I don't mind saying so to *you*, mind, sir, where all's friends together; but he'll get that right in time.'

'More like to save here than where he is,' said the Doctor with another grave nod.

'He does very wisely,' said Mr. Peers, having blown out a thin stream of smoke, 'and creditably, to pull-up in time. He's coming here to save a little, and perhaps he'll marry; and it is the more creditable, if, as they say, he dislikes the place, and would prefer staying where he is.'

And having spoken thus gently, Mr. Peers resumed his pipe cheerfully.

'No, he don't like the place; that is, I'm told he *didn't*,' said the innkeeper.

'He *hates* it,' said the Doctor with another dark nod.

'And no wonder, if all's true I've heard,' cried old Jack Amerald. 'Didn't he drown a woman and her child in the lake?'

'Hollo! my dear boy, don't let them hear you say that; you're all in the clouds.'

'By Jen!' exclaimed the landlord after an alarmed silence, with his mouth and eyes open, and his pipe in his hand, 'why, sir, I pay rent for the house up there. I'm thankful—dear knows, I *am* thankful—we're all to ourselves!'

Jack Amerald put his foot on the floor, leaving his wooden leg in its horizontal position, and looked round a little curiously.

'Well, if it wasn't him, it was some one else. I'm sure it happened up at Mardykes. I took the bearings on the water myself from Glads Scaur to Mardykes Jetty, and from the George and Dragon sign down here—down to the white house under Forrick

Fells. I could fix a buoy over the very spot. Some one here told me the bearings, I'd take my oath, where the body was seen; and yet no boat could ever come up with it; and that was queer, you know, so I clapt it down in my log.'

'Ay, sir, there *was* some flummery like that, Captain,' said Turnbull; 'for folk will be gabbin'. But 'twas his grandsire was talked o', not him; and 'twould play the hangment wi' me doun here, if 'twas thought there was stories like that passin' in the George and Dragon.'

'Well, his grandfather; 'twas all one to the woman, I take it.'

'There never was no proof, Captain, no more than smoke; and the family up at Mardykes wouldn't allow the king to talk o' them like that, sir; for though they be lang deod that had most right to be angered in the matter, there's none o' the name but would be half daft to think 'twas still believed, and he full out as mich as any. Not that I need care more than another, though they do say he's a bit frowsy and short-waisted; for he can't shouther me out o' the George while I pay my rent, till nine hundred and ninety-nine year be rin oot; and a man, be he ne'er sa het, has time to cool before then. But there's no good quarrellin' wi' teathy folk; and it may lie in his way to do the George mony an ill turn, and mony a gude one; an' it's only fair to say it happened a long way before he was born, and there's no good in vexin' him; and I lay ye a pound, Captain, the Doctor hods wi' me.'

The Doctor, whose business was also sensitive, nodded; and then he said, 'But for all that, the story's old, Dick Turnbull—older than you or I, my jolly good friend.'

'And best forgotten,' interposed the host of the George.

'Ay, best forgotten; but that it's not like to be,' said the Doctor, plucking up courage. 'Here's our friend the Captain has heard it; and the mistake he has made shows there's one thing worse than its being quite remembered, and that is, its being *half* remembered. We can't stop people talking; and a story like that will see us all off the hooks, and be in folks' mouths as strong as ever.'

'Ay; and now I think on it, 'twas Dick Harman that has the boat down there—an old tar like myself—that told me that yarn. I was trying for pike, and he pulled me over the place, and that's how I came to hear it.—I say, Tom, my hearty, serve us out another glass of brandy, will you?' shouted the Captain's voice as the waiter crossed the room; and that florid and grizzled naval hero clapped his leg again on the chair by its wooden companion, which he was wont to call his jury-mast.

'Well, I do believe it will be spoke of longer than we are like to hear; and I don't much matter the story, if it baint told o' the wrong man.' Here he touched his tumbler with the spoon, indi-

cating by that little ring that Tom, who had returned with the Captain's grog, was to replenish it with punch. 'And Sir Bale is like to be a friend to this house. I don't see no reason why he shouldn't. The George and Dragon has bin in our family ever since the reign of King Charles the Second. It was William Turnbull in that time, which they called it the Restoration, he taking the lease from Sir Tony Mardykes that was then. They was but knights then. They was made baronets first in the reign of King George the Second; you may see it in the list of the baronets and the nobility. The lease was made to William Turnbull, which came from London; and he built the stables, which they was out o' repair, as you may read to this day in the lease; and the house has never had but one sign since—the George and Dragon, it is pretty well known in England—and one name to its master. It has been owned by a Turnbull from that day to this, and they have not been counted bad men.' A murmur of applause testified the assent of his guests. 'They has been steady church-goin' folk, and brewed good drink, and maintained the best o' characters, hereaways and farther off too, though 'tis I, Richard Turnbull, that says it; and while they pay their rent, no man has power to put them out; for their title's as good to the George and Dragon, and the two fields, and the croft, and the grazing o' their kye on the green, as Sir Bale Mardykes to the Hall up there and estate. So 'tis nout to me, except in the way o' friendliness, what the family may think o' me; only the George and they has always been kind and friendly, and I don't want to break the old custom.'

'Well said, Dick!' exclaimed Doctor Torvey; 'I hold to your conclusion; but there ain't a soul here but ourselves—and we're all friends, and you are your own master—and, hang it, you'll tell us that story about the drowned woman, as you heard it from your father long ago.'

'Ay, do, and keep us to our liquor, my hearty!' cried the Captain.

Mr. Peers looked his entreaty; and deaf Mr. Hollar, having no interest in the petition, was at least a safe witness, and, with his pipe in his lips, a cozy piece of furniture.

Richard Turnbull had his punch beside him; he looked over his shoulder. The door was closed, the fire was cheery, and the punch was fragrant, and all friendly faces about him. So said he:

'Gentlemen, as you're pleased to wish it, I don't see no great harm in it; and at any rate, 'twill prevent mistakes. It is more than ninety years since. My father was but a boy then; and many a time I heard him tell it in this very room.'

And looking into his glass he mused, and stirred his punch slowly.

Chapter II.

THE DROWNED WOMAN.

'It ain't much of a homminy,' said the host of the George. 'I'll not keep you long over it, gentlemen. There was a handsome young lady, Miss Mary Feltram o' Cloostedd by name. She was the last o' that family; they had gone very poor. There's but the walls o' the house left now: grass growing in the hall, and ivy over the gables; there's no one livin' has ever hard tell o' smoke out o' they chimblies. It stands on t'other side o' the lake, on the level, wi' a deal o' a'ad trees behint and aside it, at the gap o' the clough, under the pike o' Maiden Fells. Ye may see it wi' a spyin'-glass from the boat-bield at Mardykes Hall.'

'I've been there fifty times,' said the Doctor.

'Well, there was dealin's betwixt the two families; and there's good and bad in every family; but the Mardykes, in them days, was a wild lot. And when old Feltram o' Cloostedd died, and the young lady his daughter was left a ward o' Sir Jasper Mardykes—an ill day for her, poor lass!—twenty year older than her he was, an' more; and nothin' about him, they say, to make any one like or love him, ill-faur'd and little and dow.'

'Dow—that's gloomy,' Doctor Torvey instructed the Captain, aside.

'But, they do say, they has an old blud-stean ring in the family that has a charm in't; and happen how it might, the poor lass fell in love wi' him. Some said they was married. Some said it hang'd i' the bell-ropes, and never had the priest's blessing; but anyhow, married or no, there was talk enough amang the folk, and out o' doors she would na budge. And there was two wee barns; and she prayed him hard to confess the marriage, poor thing! But 'twas a bootlese bene, and he would not allow they should bear his name, but their mother's; he was a hard man, and hed the bit in his teeth, and went his ain gait. And having tired of her, he took in his head to marry a lady of the Barnets, and it behoved him to be shut o' her and her children; and so she nor them was seen no more at Mardykes Hall. And the eldest, a boy, was left in care of my grandfather's father here in the George.'

'That queer Philip Feltram that's travelling with Sir Bale so long is a descendant of his?' said the Doctor.

'Grandson,' observed Mr. Peers, removing his pipe for a moment; 'and he is the last of that stock.'

'Well, no one could tell where she was gone to. Some said to distant parts, some said to the madhouse, some one thing, some another; but neither she nor the barn was ever seen or spoke to by the folk at Mardykes in life again. There was one Mr. Wigram that

lived in them times down at Moultry, and had sarved, like the Captain here, in the king's navy in his day; and early of a morning down he comes to the town here for a boat, sayin' he was looking toward Snakes Island through his spyin'-glass, and he seen a woman about a hundred and fifty yards outside of it; the Captain here has heard the bearings right enough. From her hips upward she was stark and straight out o' the water, and a baby in her arms. Well, no one else could see it, nor he neither, when they went down to the boat. But next morning he saw the same thing, and the boatman saw it too; and they rowed for it, both pulling might and main; but after a mile or so they could see it no more, and gave over. The next that saw it was the vicar, I forget his name now—but he was up the lake to a funeral at Mortlock Church; and coming back by moonlight with a bit of a sail up, just passin' Snakes Island, what should they hear on a sudden but a wowl like a death-cry, shrill and bleak, as made the very blood hoot in their veins; and looking along the water not a hundred yards away, they saw the same grizzled sight in the moonlight; so they turned the tiller, and came near enough to see her face—blea it was, and drenched wi' water—and she was above the lake to her middle, stiff as a post, holdin' the weeny barn out to them, and flyrin' [smiling scornfully] on them as they drew nigh her. They were half-frighted, not knowing what to make of it; but passing as close as the boatman could bring her side, the vicar stretched over the gunwale to catch her, and she bent forward, pushing the dead bab forward; and as she did, on a sudden she gave another yell that scared them, and they saw her no more. 'Twas no livin' woman, for she couldn't rise that height above the water, as they well knew when they came to think; and they knew it was a dobby they saw; and ye may be sure they didn't spare prayer and blessin', and went on their course straight before the wind; for neither would a-took the worth o' all Mardykes to look sich a freetin' i' the face again. 'Twas seen another time by market-folk crossin' fra Gyllenston in the self-same place; and Snakes Island got a bad neam, and none cared to go nar it after nightfall.'

'Do you know anything of that Feltram that has been with him abroad?' asked the Doctor.

'They say he's no good at anything—a harmless mafflin; he was a lang gaumless gawky when he went awa,' said Richard Turnbull. 'The Feltrams and the Mardykes was sib, ye know; and that made what passed in the misfortune o' that young lady spoken of all the harder; and this poor young man ye speak of is grandson o' the lad that was put here in care o' my grandfather.'

'*Great*-grandson. His father was grandson,' said Mr. Peers; 'he held a commission in the army, and died in the West Indies. This Philip Feltram is the last of that line—illegitimate, you know,

it is held—and the little that remained of the Feltram property went nearly fourscore years ago to the Mardykes, and this Philip is maintained by Sir Bale; it is pleasant, notwithstanding all the stories one hears, gentlemen, that the only thing we know of him for certain should be so creditable to his kindness.'

'To be sure,' acquiesced Mr. Turnbull.

While they talked, the horn sounded, and the mail-coach drew up at the door of the George and Dragon to set down a passenger and his luggage.

Dick Turnbull rose and went out to the hall with careful bustle, and Doctor Torvey followed as far as the door, which commanded a view of it, and saw several trunks cased in canvas pitched into the hall, and by careful Tom and a boy lifted one on top of the other, behind the corner of the banister. It would have been below the dignity of his cloth to go out and read the labels on these, or the Doctor would have done otherwise, so great was his curiosity.

Chapter III.

PHILIP FELTRAM.

The new guest was now in the hall of the George, and Doctor Torvey could hear him talking with Mr. Turnbull. Being himself one of the dignitaries of Golden Friars, the Doctor, having regard to first impressions, did not care to be seen in his post of observation; and closing the door gently, returned to his chair by the fire, and in an under-tone informed his cronies that there was a new arrival in the George, and he could not hear, but would not wonder if he were taking a private room; and he seemed to have trunks enough to build a church with.

'Don't be too sure we haven't Sir Bale on board,' said Amerald, who would have followed his crony the Doctor to the door—for never was retired naval hero of a village more curious than he—were it not that his wooden leg made a distinct pounding on the floor that was inimical, as experience had taught him, to mystery.

'That can't be,' answered the Doctor; 'Charley Twyne knows everything about it, and has a letter every second day; and there's no chance of Sir Bale before the tenth; this is a tourist, you'll find. I don't know what the d—l keeps Turnbull; he knows well enough we are all naturally anxious to hear who it is.'

'Well, he won't trouble us here, I bet ye;' and catching deaf Mr. Hollar's eye, the Captain nodded, and pointed to the little table beside him, and made a gesture imitative of the rattling of a dice-box; at which that quiet old gentleman nodded also sunnily; and up got the Captain and conveyed the backgammon-box to the table, near Hollar's elbow, and the two worthies were soon sinc-ducing and catre-acing, with the pleasant clatter that accompanies

that ancient game. Hollar had thrown sixes and made his double point, and the honest Captain, who could stand many things better than Hollar's throwing such throws so early in the evening, cursed his opponent's luck and sneered at his play, and called the company to witness, with a distinctness which a stranger to smiling Hollar's deafness would have thought hardly civil; and just at this moment the door opened, and Richard Turnbull showed his new guest into the room, and ushered him to a vacant seat near the other corner of the table before the fire.

The stranger advanced slowly and shyly, with something a little deprecatory in his air, to which a lathy figure, a slight stoop, and a very gentle and even heart-broken look in his long pale face, gave a more marked character of shrinking and timidity.

He thanked the landlord aside, as it were, and took his seat with a furtive glance round, as if he had no right to come in and intrude upon the happiness of these honest gentlemen.

He saw the Captain scanning him from under his shaggy gray eyebrows while he was pretending to look only at his game; and the Doctor was able to recount to Mrs. Torvey when he went home every article of the stranger's dress.

It was odd and melancholy as his peaked face.

He had come into the room with a short black cloak on, and a rather tall foreign felt hat, and a pair of shiny leather gaiters or leggings on his thin legs; and altogether presented a general resemblance to the conventional figure of Guy Fawkes.

Not one of the company assembled there knew the appearance of the Baronet. The Doctor and old Mr. Peers remembered something of his looks; and certainly they had no likeness, but the reverse, to those presented by the new-comer. The Baronet, as now described by people who had chanced to see him, was a dark man, not above the middle size, and with a certain decision in his air and talk; whereas this person was tall, pale, and in air and manner feeble. So this broken trader in the world's commerce, with whom all seemed to have gone wrong, could not possibly be he.

Presently, in one of his stealthy glances, the Doctor's eye encountered that of the stranger, who was by this time drinking his tea—a thin and feminine liquor little used in that room.

The stranger did not seem put out; and the Doctor, interpreting his look as a permission to converse, cleared his voice, and said urbanely,

'We have had a little frost by night down here, sir, and a little fire is no great harm—it is rather pleasant, don't you think?'

The stranger bowed acquiescence with a transient wintry smile, and looked gratefully on the fire.

'This place is a good deal admired, sir, and people come a good way to see it; you have been here perhaps before?'

'Many years ago.'

Here was another pause.

'Places change imperceptibly—in detail, at least—a good deal,' said the Doctor, making an effort to keep up a conversation that plainly would not go on of itself; 'and people too; population shifts—there's an old fellow, sir, they call *Death*.'

'And an old fellow they call the *Doctor*, that helps him,' threw in the Captain humorously, allowing his attention to get entangled in the conversation, and treating them to one of his tempestuous ha-ha-ha's.

'We are expecting the return of a gentleman who would be a very leading member of our little society down here,' said the Doctor, without noticing the Captain's joke. 'I mean Sir Bale Mardykes. Mardykes Hall is a pretty object from the water, sir, and a very fine old place.'

The melancholy stranger bowed slightly, but rather in courtesy to the relator, it seemed, than that the Doctor's lore interested him much.

'And on the opposite side of the lake,' continued Doctor Torvey, 'there is a building that contrasts very well with it—the old house of the Feltrams—quite a ruin now, at the mouth of the glen—Cloostedd House, a very picturesque object.'

'Exactly opposite,' said the stranger dreamily, but whether in the tone of acquiescence or of interrogatory, the Doctor could not be quite sure.

'That was one of our great families down here that has disappeared. It has dwindled down to nothing.'

'Duce ace,' remarked Mr. Hollar, who was attending to his game.

'While others have mounted more suddenly and amazingly still,' observed gentle Mr. Peers, who was great upon county genealogies.

'Sizes!' thundered the Captain, thumping the table with an oath of disgust.

'And Snakes Island is a very pretty object; they say there used to be snakes there,' said the Doctor, enlightening the visitor.

'Ah! that's a mistake,' said the dejected guest, making his first original observation. 'It should be spelt *Snaiks*. In the old papers it is called Sen-aiks Island, from the seven oaks that grew in a clump there.'

'Hey? that's very curious, egad! I daresay,' said the Doctor, set right thus by the stranger, and eyeing him curiously.

'Very true, sir,' observed Mr. Peers; 'three of those oaks, though, two of them little better than stumps, are there still; and Clewson of Heckleston has an old document—'

Here, unhappily, the landlord entered the room in a fuss, and

walking up to the stranger, said, 'The chaise is at the door, Mr. Feltram, and the trunks up, sir.'

. Mr. Feltram rose quietly and took out his purse, and said,

'I suppose I had better pay at the bar?'

'As you like best, sir,' said Richard Turnbull.

Mr. Feltram bowed all round to the gentlemen, who smiled, ducked, or waved their hands; and the Doctor fussily followed him to the hall-door, and welcomed him back to Golden Friars—there was real kindness in this welcome—and proffered his broad brown hand, which Mr. Feltram took; and then he plunged into his chaise, and the door being shut, away he glided, chaise, horses, and driver, like shadows, by the margin of the moonlighted lake, towards Mardykes Hall.

And after a minute's stand upon the steps, looking along the shadowy track of the chaise, they returned to the glow of the room, in which a pleasant perfume of punch still prevailed; and beside Mr. Philip Feltram's deserted tea-things, the host of the George enlightened his guests by communicating freely the little he had picked up. The principal fact he had to tell was, that Sir Bale adhered strictly to his original plan, and was to arrive on the tenth. A few days would bring them to that, and the nine-days wonder run its course and lose its interest. But in the mean time, all Golden Friars was anxious to see what Sir Bale Mardykes was like.

Chapter IV.

THE BARONET APPEARS.

As the candles burn blue and the air smells of brimstone at the approach of the Evil One, so, in the quiet and healthy air of Golden Friars, a depressing and agitating influence announced the coming of the long-absent Baronet.

From abroad, no good whatever had been at any time heard of him, and a great deal that was, in the ears of simple folk living in that unsophisticated part of the world, vaguely awful.

Stories that travel so far, however, lose something of their authority, as well as definiteness, on the way; there was always room for charity to suggest a mistake or exaggeration; and if good men turned up their hands and eyes after a new story, and ladies of experience, who knew mankind, held their heads high and looked grim and mysterious at mention of his name, nevertheless an interval of silence softened matters a little, and the sulphureous perfume dissipated itself in time.

Now that Sir Bale Mardykes had arrived at the Hall, there were hurried consultations held in many households. And though he was tried and sentenced by drum-head over some austere hearths, as a rule the law of gravitation prevailed, and the greater house drew

the lesser about it, and country people within the visiting radius paid their respects at the Hall.

The Reverend Martin Bedel, the then vicar of Golden Friars, a stout short man, with a mulberry-coloured nose and small gray eyes, and taciturn habits, called and entered the drawing-room at Mardykes Hall, with his fat and garrulous wife on his arm.

The drawing-room had a great projecting Tudor window looking out on the lake, with its magnificent back-ground of furrowed and purple mountains.

Sir Bale was not there, and Mrs. Bedel examined the pictures, and ornaments, and the books, making such remarks as she saw fit; and then she looked out of the window, and admired the prospect. She wished to stand well with the Baronet, and was in a mood to praise everything.

You may suppose she was curious to see him, having heard for years such strange tales of his doings.

She expected the hero of a brilliant and wicked romance; and listened for the step of the truant Lovelace who was to fulfil her idea of manly beauty and fascination.

She sustained a slight shock when he did appear.

Sir Bale Mardykes was, as she might easily have remembered, a middle-aged man—and he looked it. He was not even an imposing-looking man for his time of life: he was of about the middle height, slightly made, and dark featured. She had expected something of the gaiety and animation of Versailles, and an evident cultivation of the art of pleasing. What she did see was a remarkable gravity, not to say gloom, of countenance—the only feature of which that struck her being a pair of large dark-gray eyes, that were cold and earnest. His manners had the ease of perfect confidence; and his talk and air were those of a person who might have known how to please, if it were worth the trouble, but who did not care twopence whether he pleased or not.

He made them each a bow, courtly enough, but there was no smile—not even an affectation of cordiality. Sir Bale, however, was chatty, and did not seem to care much what he said, or what people thought of him; and there was a suspicion of sarcasm in what he said that the rustic literality of good Mrs. Bedel did not always detect.

'I believe I have not a clergyman but *you*, sir, within any reasonable distance?'

'Golden Friars *is* the nearest,' said Mrs. Bedel, answering, as was her pleasure on all practicable occasions, for her husband. 'And southwards, the nearest is Wyllarden—and by a bird's flight that is thirteen miles and a half, and by the road more than nineteen—twenty, I may say, by the road. Ha, ha, ha! it is a long way to look for a clergyman.'

'Twenty miles of road to carry you thirteen miles across, hey? The road-makers lead you a pretty dance here; those gentlemen know how to make money, and like to show people the scenery from a variety of points. No one likes a straight road but the man who pays for it, and who, when he travels, is brute enough to wish to get to his journey's end.'

'That is so true, Sir Bale; one never cares if one is not in a hurry. That's what Martin thinks—don't we, Martin?—And then, you know, coming home is the time you *are* in a hurry—when you are thinking of your cup of tea and the children; and *then*, you know, you have the fall of the ground all in your favour.'

'It's well to have anything in your favour in this place. And so there are children?'

'A good many,' said Mrs. Bedel, with a proud and mysterious smile, and a nod; 'you wouldn't guess how many.'

'Not I; I only wonder you did not bring them all.'

'That's very good-natured of you, Sir Bale, but all could not come at *one* bout; there are—tell him, Martin—ha, ha, ha! there are eleven.'

'It must be very cheerful down at the vicarage,' said Sir Bale graciously; and turning to the vicar he added, 'But how unequally blessings are divided! you have eleven, and I not one—that I'm aware of.'

'And then, in that direction straight before you, you have the lake, and then the fells; and five miles from the foot of the mountain at the other side, before you reach Fottrell—and that is twenty-five miles by the road—'

'Dear me! how far apart they are set! My gardener told me this morning that asparagus grows very thinly in this part of the world. How thinly clergymen grow also down here—in one sense,' he added politely, for the vicar was stout.

'We were looking out of the window—we amused ourselves that way before you came—and your view is certainly the very best anywhere round this side; your view of the lake and the fells—what mountains they are, Sir Bale!'

''Pon my soul, they are! I wish I could blow them asunder with a charge of duck-shot, and I shouldn't be stifled by them long. But I suppose, as we can't get rid of them, the next best thing is to admire them. We are pretty well married to them, and there is no use in quarrelling.'

'I know you don't think so, Sir Bale, ha, ha, ha! You wouldn't take a good deal and spoil Mardykes Hall.'

'You can't get a mouthful of air, or see the sun of a morning, for those frightful mountains,' he said with a peevish frown at them.

'Well, the lake at all events—that you *must* admire, Sir Bale?'

'No, ma'am, I don't admire the lake. I'd drain the lake if I could—I hate the lake. There's nothing so gloomy as a lake pent up among barren mountains. I can't conceive what possessed my people to build our house down here, at the edge of a lake; unless it was the fish, and precious fish it is—pike! I don't know how people digest it—*I* can't. I'd as soon think of eating a watchman's pike.'

'I thought that having travelled so much abroad, you would have acquired a great liking for that kind of scenery, Sir Bale; there is a great deal of it on the Continent, ain't there?' said Mrs. Bedel. 'And the boating.'

'Boating, my dear Mrs. Bedel, is the dullest of all things; don't you think so? Because a boat looks very pretty from the shore, we fancy the shore must look very pretty from a boat; and when we try it, we find we have only got down into a pit and can see nothing rightly. For my part I hate boating, and I hate the water; and I'd rather have my house, like Haworth, at the edge of a moss, with good wholesome peat to look at, and an open horizon—savage and stupid and bleak as all that is—than be suffocated among impassable mountains, or upset in a black lake and drowned like a kitten. O, there's luncheon in the next room; won't you take some?'

Chapter V.

MRS. JULAPER'S ROOM.

Sir Bale Mardykes being now established in his ancestral house, people had time to form conclusions respecting him. It must be allowed he was not popular. There was, perhaps, in his conduct something of the caprice of contempt. At all events his temper and conduct were uncertain, and his moods sometimes violent and insulting.

With respect to but one person was his conduct uniform, and that was Philip Feltram. He was a sort of aide-de-camp near Sir Bale's person, and chargeable with all commissions and offices which could not be suitably intrusted to a mere servant. But in many respects he was treated worse than any servant of the Baronet's. Sir Bale swore at him, and cursed him; laid the blame of everything that went wrong in house, stable, or field upon his shoulders; railed at him, and used him, as people said, worse than a dog.

Why did Feltram endure this contumelious life? What could he do but endure it? was the answer. What was the power that induced strong soldiers to put off their jackets and shirts, and present their hands to be tied up, and tortured for hours, it might be, under the scourge, with an air of ready volition? The moral coercion of despair; the result of an unconscious calculation of chances which satisfies them that it is ultimately better to do all that, bad as

it is, than try the alternative. These unconscious calculations are going on every day with each of us, and the results embody themselves in our lives; and no one knows that there has been a process and a balance struck, and that what they see, and very likely blame, is by the fiat of an invisible but quite irresistible power.

A man of spirit would rather break stones on the highway than eat that bitter bread, was the burden of every man's song on Feltram's bondage. But he was not so sure that even the stone-breaker's employment was open to him, or that he could break stones well enough to retain it on a fair trial. And he had other ideas of providing for himself, and a different alternative in his mind.

Good-natured Mrs. Julaper, the old housekeeper at Mardykes Hall, was kind to Feltram, as to all others who lay in her way and were in affliction.

She was one of those good women whom Nature provides to receive the burden of other people's secrets, as the reeds did long ago, only that no chance wind could steal them away, and send them singing into strange ears.

You may still see her snuggery in Mardykes Hall, though the housekeeper's room is now in a different part of the house.

Mrs. Julaper's room was in the oldest quarter of that old house. It was wainscoted, in black panels, up to the ceiling, which was stuccoed over in the fanciful diagrams of James the First's time. Several dingy portraits, banished from time to time from other state-lier rooms, found a temporary abode in this quiet spot, where they had come finally to settle and drop out of remembrance. There is a lady in white satin and a ruff; a gentleman whose legs have faded out of view, with a peaked beard, and a hawk on his wrist. There is another in a black periwig lost in the dark back-ground, and with a steel cuirass, the gleam of which out of the darkness strikes the eye, and a scarf is dimly discoverable across it. This is that foolish Sir Guy Mardykes, who crossed the Border and joined Dundee, and was shot through the temple at Killiecrankie, and whom more prudent and whiggish scions of the Mardykes family removed forthwith from his place in the Hall, and found him a retirement here, from which he has not since emerged.

At the far end of this snug room is a second door, on opening which you find yourself looking down upon the great kitchen, with a little balcony before you, from which the housekeeper used to issue her commands to the cook, and exercise a sovereign supervision.

There is a shelf here on which Mrs. Julaper had her Bible, her *Whole Duty of Man*, and her *Pilgrim's Progress;* and, in a file beside them, her books of housewifery, and among them volumes of MS. recipes, cookery-books, and some too on surgery and medicine, as practised by the Ladies Bountiful of the Elizabethan age, for which an antiquarian would nowadays give an eye or a hand.

Gentle half-foolish Philip Feltram would tell the story of his wrongs, and weep and wish he was dead; and kind Mrs. Julaper, who remembered him a child, would comfort him with cold pie and cherry-brandy, or a cup of coffee, or some little dainty.

'O, ma'am, I'm tired of my life. What's the good of living, if a poor devil is never let alone, and called worse names than a dog? Would not it be better, Mrs. Julaper, to be dead? Wouldn't it be better, mă'am? I think so; I think it night and day. I'm always thinking the same thing. I don't care, I'll just tell him what I think, and have it off my mind. I'll tell him I can't live and bear it longer.'

'There now, don't you be frettin'; but just sip this, and remember you're not to judge a friend by a wry word. He does not mean it, not he. They all had a rough side to their tongue now and again; but no one minded that. I don't, nor you needn't, no more than other folk; for the tongue, be it never so bitin', it can't draw blood, mind ye, and hard words break no bones; and I'll make a cup o' tea—ye like a cup o' tea—and we'll take a cup together, and ye'll chirp up a bit, and see how pleasant and ruddy the sun shines in the lake this evening.'

She was patting him gently on the shoulder, as she stood slim and stiff in her dark silk by his chair, and her rosy little face smiled down on him. She was, for an old woman, wonderfully pretty still. What a delicate skin she must have had! The wrinkles were etched upon it with so fine a needle, you scarcely could see them a little way off; and as she smiled her cheeks looked fresh and smooth as two ruddy little apples.

'Look out, I say,' and she nodded towards the window, deep set in the thick wall. 'See how bright and soft everything looks in that pleasant light; *that's* better, child, than the finest picture man's hand ever painted yet, and God gives it us for nothing; and how pretty Snakes Island glows up in that light!'

The dejected man, hardly raising his head, followed with his eyes the glance of the old woman, and looked mournfully through the window.

'That island troubles me, Mrs. Julaper.'

'Everything troubles you, my poor goose-cap. I'll pull your lug for ye, child, if ye be so dowly;' and with a mimic pluck the good-natured old housekeeper pinched his ear and laughed.

'I'll go to the still-room now, where the water's boiling, and I'll make a cup of tea; and if I find ye so dow when I come back, I'll throw it all out o' the window, mind.'

It was indeed a beautiful picture that Feltram saw in its deep frame of old masonry. The near part of the lake was flushed all over with the low western light; the more distant waters lay dark in the shadow of the mountains; and against this shadow of purple the

rocks on Snakes Island, illuminated by the setting sun, started into sharp clear light.

But this beautiful view had no charm—at least, none powerful enough to master the latent horror associated with its prettiest feature—for the weak and dismal man who was looking at it; and being now alone, he rose and leant on the window, and looked out, and then with a kind of shudder clutching his hands together, and walking distractedly about the room.

Without his perceiving, while his back was turned, the housekeeper came back; and seeing him walking in this distracted way, she thought to herself, as he leant again upon the window:

'Well, it *is* a burning shame to worrit any poor soul into that state. Sir Bale was always down on someone or something, man or beast; there always was something he hated, and could never let alone. It was not pretty; it was his nature. Happen, poor fellow, he could not help it; but so it was.'

A maid came in and set the tea-things down; and Mrs. Julaper drew her sad guest over by the arm, and made him sit down, and she said: 'What has a man to do, frettin' in that way? By Jen, I'm ashamed o' ye, Master Philip! Ye like three lumps o' sugar, I think, and—look cheerful, ye must!—a good deal o' cream?'

'You're so kind, Mrs. Julaper, you're so cheery. I feel quite comfortable after awhile when I'm with you; I feel quite happy,' and he began to cry.

She understood him very well by this time, and took no notice, but went on chatting gaily, and made his tea as he liked it; and he dried up his tears hastily, thinking she had not observed.

So the clouds began to clear. This innocent fellow liked nothing better than a cup of tea and a chat with gentle and cheery old Mrs. Julaper, and a talk in which the shadowy old times which he remembered as a child emerged into sunlight and lived again.

When he began to feel better, drawn into the kindly old times by the tinkle of that harmless old woman's tongue, he said:

'I sometimes think I would not so much mind—I should not care so much—if my spirits were not so much depressed, and I so agitated. I suppose I am not quite well.'

'Well, tell me what's wrong, child, and it's odd but I have a recipe on the shelf there that will do you good.'

'It is not a matter of that sort I mean; though I'd rather have you than any doctor, if I needed medicine, to prescribe for me.'

Mrs. Julaper smiled in spite of herself, well pleased; for her skill in pharmacy was a point on which the good lady prided herself, and was open to flattery, which, without intending it, the simple fellow administered.

'No, I'm well enough; I can't say I ever was better. It is only, ma'am, that I have such dreams—you have no idea.'

'There are dreams and dreams, my dear: there's some signifies no more than the babble of the lake down there on the pebbles, and there's others that has a meaning; there's dreams that is but vanity, and there's dreams that is good, and dreams that is bad. Lady Mardykes—heavens be her bed this day! that's his grandmother I mean—was very sharp for reading dreams. Take another cup of tea. Dear me! what a noise the crows keep aboon our heads, going home! and how high they wing it!—that's a sure sign of fine weather. An' what do you dream about? tell me your dream, and I may show you it's a good one, after all. For many a dream is ugly to see and ugly to tell, and a good dream, with a happy meaning, for all that.'

Chapter VI.

THE INTRUDER.

'Well, Mrs. Julaper, dreams I've dreamed like other people, old and young; but this, ma'am, has taken a fast hold of me,' said Mr. Feltram dejectedly, leaning back in his chair and looking down with his hands in his pockets. 'I think, Mrs. Julaper, it is getting into me. I think it's like possession.'

'Possession, child! what do you mean?'

'I think there is something trying to influence me. Perhaps it is the way fellows go mad; but it won't let me alone. I've seen it three times, think of that!'

'Well, dear, and what *have* ye seen?' she asked with an uneasy cheerfulness, smiling, with eyes fixed steadily upon him; for the idea of a madman—even gentle Philip in that state—was not quieting.

'Do you remember the picture, full-length, that had no frame—the lady in the white-satin saque—she was beautiful, *funeste*,' he added, talking more to himself; and then more distinctly to Mrs. Julaper again—'in the white-satin saque; and with the little mob-cap and blue ribbons to it, and a bouquet in her fingers; that was—that—you know who she was?'

'That was your great-grandmother, my dear,' said Mrs. Julaper, lowering her eyes. 'It was a dreadful pity it was spoiled. The boys in the pantry had it for a year there on the table for a tray, to wash the glasses on and the like. It was a shame; that was the prettiest picture in the house, with the gentlest, rosiest face.'

'It ain't so gentle or rosy now, I can tell you,' said Philip. 'As fixed as marble; with thin lips, and a curve at the nostril. Do you remember the woman that was found dead in the clough, when I was a boy, that the gipsies murdered, it was thought,—a cruel-looking woman?'

'Agoy! Master Philip dear! ye would not name that terrible-looking creature with the pretty, fresh, kindly face!'

'Faces change, you see; no matter what she's like; it's her

talk that frightens me. She wants to make use of me; and, you see, it is like getting a share in my mind, and a voice in my thoughts, and a command over me gradually; and it is just one idea, as straight as a line of light across the lake—see what she's come to. O Lord, help me!'

'Well, now, don't you be talkin' like that. It is just a little bit dowly and troubled, because the master says a wry word now and then; and so ye let your spirits go down, don't ye see, and all sorts o' fancies comes into your head.'

'There's no fancy in my head,' he said with a quick look of suspicion; 'only you asked me what I dreamed. I don't care if all the world knew. I dreamed I went down steps into the lake, and got a message. There are no steps near Snakes Island, we all know that,' and he laughed chillily. 'I'm out of spirits, as you say; and—and—O dear! I wish—Mrs. Julaper—I wish I was in my coffin, and quiet.'

'Now that's very wrong of you, Master Philip; you should think of all the blessings you have, and not be makin' mountains o' molehills; and those little bits o' temper Sir Bale shows, why, no one minds 'em—that is, to take 'em to heart like you do, don't ye see?'

'I daresay; I suppose, Mrs. Julaper, you are right. I'm unreasonable often, I know,' said gentle Philip Feltram. 'I daresay I make too much of it; I'll try. I'm his secretary, and I know I'm not so bright as he is, and it is natural he should sometimes be a little impatient; I ought to be more reasonable, I'm sure. It is all that thing that has been disturbing me—I mean fretting; and, I think, I'm not quite well; and—and letting myself think too much of vexations. It's my own fault, I'm sure, Mrs. Julaper; and I know I'm to blame.'

'That's quite right, that's spoken like a wise lad; only I don't say you're to blame, nor no one; for folk can't help frettin' sometimes, no more than they can help a headache—none but a mafflin would say that—and I'll not deny but he has dowly ways when the fit's on him, and he frumps us all round, if such be his humour. But who is there hasn't his faults? We must bear and forbear, and take what we get and be cheerful. So chirp up, my lad; Philip, didn't I often ring the a'ad rhyme in your ear long ago?

Be always as merry as ever you can,
For no one delights in a sorrowful man.

So don't ye be gettin' up off your chair like that, and tramping about the room wi' your hands in your pockets, looking out o' this window and staring out o' that, and sighing and crying, and looking so black-ox-trodden, 'twould break a body's heart to see you. Ye must be cheery; and happen you're hungry, and don't know it. I'll tell the cook to grill a hot bit for ye.'

'But I'm not hungry, Mrs. Julaper. How kind you are! dear

me, Mrs. Julaper, I'm not worthy of it; I don't deserve half your kindness. I'd have been heart-broken long ago, but for you.'

'And I'll make a sup of something hot for you; you'll take a rummer-glass of punch—you must.'

'But I like the tea better; I do indeed, Mrs. Julaper.'

'Tea is no drink for a man when his heart's down. It should be something with a leg in it, lad; something hot that will warm your courage up for ye, and set your blood a-dancing, and make ye talk brave and merry; and will you have a bit of a broil first? No? Well then, you'll have a drop o' punch?—ye sha'n't say no.'

And so, all resistance overpowered, the consolation of Philip Feltram proceeded.

A gentler spirit than poor Feltram, a more good-natured soul than the old housekeeper, were nowhere among the children of earth.

Philip Feltram, who was reserved enough elsewhere, used to come into her room and cry, and take her by both hands piteously, standing before her and looking down in her face, while tears ran deviously down his cheeks.

'Did you ever know such a case? was there ever a fellow like *me?* did you ever *know* such a thing? You know what I am, Mrs. Julaper, and who I am. They call me Feltram; but Sir Bale knows as well as I that my true name is not that. I'm Philip Mardykes; and another fellow would make a row about it, and claim his name and his rights, as she is always croaking in my ear I ought. But you know that is not reasonable. My grandmother was married; she was the true Lady Mardykes; *think* what it was to see a woman like that turned out of doors, and her children robbed of their very name. O, ma'am, you *can't* think it; unless you were me, you couldn't—you couldn't—you couldn't!'

'Come, come, Master Philip, don't you be taking on so; and ye mustn't be talking like that, d'ye mind? You know he wouldn't stand that; and it's an old story now, and there's naught can be proved concerning it; and what I think is this—I wouldn't wonder the poor lady was beguiled. But anyhow she surely thought she was his lawful wife; and though the law may hev found a flaw somewhere—and I take it 'twas so—yet sure I am she was an honourable lady. But where's the use of stirring that old sorrow? or how can ye prove aught? and the dead hold their peace, you know; dead mice, they say, feels no cold; and dead folks are past fooling. So don't you talk like that; for stone walls have ears, and ye might say that ye couldn't *un*say; and death's day is doom's day. So leave all in the keeping of God; and, above all, never lift hand when ye can't strike.'

'Lift my hand! O, Mrs. Julaper, you couldn't think that; you little know me; I did not mean that; I never dreamed of hurting Sir Bale. Good heavens! Mrs. Julaper, you couldn't think *that!*

It all comes of my poor impatient temper, and complaining as I do, and my misery; but O, Mrs. Julaper, you could not think I ever meant to trouble him by law, or any other annoyance! I'd like to see a stain removed from my family, and my name restored; but to touch his property, O, no!—O, no! that never entered my mind; by heaven! that never entered my mind, Mrs. Julaper. I'm not cruel; I'm not rapacious; I don't care for money; don't you know that, Mrs. Julaper? O, surely you won't think me capable of attacking the man whose bread I have been eating so long! I never dreamed of it; I should hate myself. Tell me you don't believe it; O, Mrs. Julaper, say you don't!'

And the gentle feeble creature burst into tears, and good Mrs. Julaper comforted him with kind words; and he said,

'Thank you, ma'am; thank you. God knows I would not hurt Bale, nor give him one uneasy hour. It is only this: that I'm—I'm so miserable; and I'm only casting in my mind where to turn to, and what to do. So little a thing would be enough, and then I shall leave Mardykes. I'll go; not in any anger, Mrs. Julaper—don't think that; but I can't stay, I must be gone.'

'Well, now, there's nothing yet, Master Philip, to fret you like that. You should not be talking so wild-like. Master Bale has his sharp word and his short temper now and again; but I'm sure he likes you. If he didn't, he'd a-said so to me long ago. I'm sure he likes you well.'

'Hollo! I say, who's there? Where the devil's Mr. Feltram?' screamed the voice of the Baronet, at a fierce pitch, along the passage.

'La! Mr. Feltram, it's him! Ye'd better run to him,' whispered Mrs. Julaper.

'D—n me! does nobody hear? Mrs. Julaper! Hollo! ho! house, there! ho! D—n me, will nobody answer?'

And Sir Bale began to slap the wainscot fast and furiously with his walking-cane with a clatter like a harlequin's lath in a pantomime.

Mrs. Julaper, a little paler than usual, opened her door, and stood with the handle in hand, making a little curtsey, enframed in the door-case; and Sir Bale, being in a fume, when he saw her, ceased whacking the panels of the corridor, and stamped on the floor, crying,

'Upon my soul, ma'am, I'm glad to see you! Perhaps you can tell me where Feltram is?'

'He's in my room, Sir Bale. Shall I tell him you want him, please?'

'Never mind; thanks,' said the Baronet. 'I've a tongue in my head;' marching down the passage to the housekeeper's room, with his cane clutched hard, glaring savagely, and with his teeth fast set, like a fellow advancing to beat a vicious horse that has chafed his temper.



J. A. Pasquier, del. Edmund Evans, sc.

"SOMETHING WHITE COME OUT O' T' WATER."

THE HAUNTED BARONET

BY J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS,' ETC.

Chapter VII. The Bank-note.

Sir Bale brushed by the housekeeper as he strode into her sanctuary, and there found Philip Feltram awaiting him dejectedly, but with no signs of agitation.

If one were to judge by the appearance the master of Mardykes presented, very grave surmises as to impending violence would have suggested themselves; but though he clutched his cane so hard that it quivered in his grasp, he had no notion of committing the outrage of a blow. The Baronet was unusually angry notwithstanding, and stopping short about three steps away, addressed Feltram with a pale face and gleaming eyes. It was quite plain that there was something very exciting upon his mind.

'I've been looking for you, Mr. Feltram; I want a word or two, if you have done your—your—whatever it is.' He whisked the point of his stick towards the modest tea-tray. 'I should like five minutes in the library.'

The Baronet was all this time eyeing Feltram with a hard suspicious gaze, as if he expected to read in his face the shrinkings and trepidations of guilt; and then turning suddenly on his heel he led the way to his library—a good long march, with a good many turnings. He walked very fast, and was not long in getting there. And as Sir Bale reached the hearth, on which was smouldering a great log of wood, and turned about suddenly, facing the door, Philip Feltram entered.

The Baronet looked oddly and stern—so oddly, it seemed to Feltram, that he could not take his eyes off him, and returned his grim and somewhat embarrassed gaze with a stare of alarm and speculation.

And so doing, his step was shortened, and grew slow and slower, and came quite to a stop before he had got far from the door—a wide stretch of that wide floor still intervening between him and Sir Bale, who stood upon the hearthrug, with his heels together and his back to the fire, cane in hand, like a drill-sergeant, facing him.

'Shut that door, please; that will do; come nearer now. I don't want to bawl what I have to say. Now listen.'

The Baronet cleared his voice and paused, with his eyes upon Feltram.

'It is only two or three days ago,' said he, 'that you said you wished you had a hundred pounds. Am I right?'

'Yes; I think so.'

'*Think?* you know it, sir, devilish well. You said that you wished to get away. I have nothing particular to say against that, more especially now. Do you understand what I say?'

'Understand, Sir Bale? I do, sir—quite.'

'I daresay *quite*,' he repeated with an angry sneer. 'Here, sir, is an odd coincidence: you want a hundred pounds, and you can't earn it, and you can't borrow it—there's another way, it seems—but I have got it—a Bank-of-England note of 100*l.*—locked up in that desk;' and he poked the end of his cane against the brass lock of it viciously. 'There it is, and there are the papers you work at; and there are two keys—I've got one and you have the other—and devil another key in or out of the house has any one living. Well, do you begin to see? Don't mind. I don't want any d—d lying about it.'

Feltram was indeed beginning to see that he was suspected of something very bad, but exactly what, he was not yet sure; and being a man of that unhappy temperament which shrinks from suspicion, as others do from detection, he looked very much put out indeed.

'Ha, ha! I think we do begin to see,' said Sir Bale savagely. 'It's a bore, I know, troubling a fellow with a story that he knows before; but I'll make mine short. When I take my key, intending to send the note to pay the crown and quit-rents that you know—you—you—no matter—you know well enough must be paid, I open it so—and so—and look *there*, where I left it, for my note; and the note's gone—you understand, the note's *gone!*'

Here was a pause, during which, under the Baronet's hard insulting eye, poor Feltram winced, and cleared his voice, and essayed to speak, but said nothing.

'It's gone, and we know where. Now, Mr. Feltram, *I* did not steal that note, and no one but you and I has access to this desk. You wish to go away, and I have no objection to that—but d—n me if you take away that note with you; and you may as well produce it now and here, as hereafter in a worse place.'

'O, my good heaven!' exclaimed poor Feltram at last. 'I'm very ill.'

'So you are, of course. It takes a stiff emetic to get all that money off a fellow's stomach; and it's like parting with a tooth to give up a bank-note. Of course you're ill, but that's no sign of innocence, and I'm no fool. You had better give the thing up quietly.'

'May my Maker strike me—'

'So He will, you d—d rascal, if there's justice in heaven, unless you produce the money. I don't want to hang you. I'm willing to let you off if you'll let me, but I'm cursed if I let my note off along with you; and unless you give it up forthwith, I'll get a warrant and have you searched, pockets, bag, and baggage.'

'Lord! am I awake?' exclaimed Philip Feltram.

'Wide awake, and so am I,' replied Sir Bale. 'You don't happen to have got it about you?'

'God forbid, sir! O, Sir—O, Sir Bale—why, Bale, *Bale*, it's impossible! You *can't* believe it. When did I ever wrong you? You knew me since I was not higher than the table, and—and—'

He burst into tears.

'Stop your snivelling, sir, and give-up the note. You know devilish well I can't spare it; and I won't spare you if you put me to it. I've said my say.'

Sir Bale signed towards the door; and like a somnambulist, with dilated gaze and pale as death, Philip Feltram, at his wit's end, went out of the room. It was not till he had again reached the housekeeper's door that he recollected in what direction he was going. His shut hand was pressed with all his force to his heart, and the first breath he was conscious of was a deep wild sob or two that quivered from his heart as he looked from the lobby-window upon a landscape which he did not see.

All he had ever suffered before was mild in comparison with this dire paroxysm. Now, for the first time, was he made acquainted with his real capacity for pain, and how near he might be to madness and yet retain intellect enough to weigh every scruple, and calculate every chance and consequence, in his torture.

Sir Bale, in the mean time, had walked out a little more excited than he would have allowed. He was still convinced that Feltram had stolen the note, but not quite so certain as he had been. There were things in his manner that confirmed, and others that perplexed, Sir Bale.

The Baronet stood upon the margin of the lake, almost under the evening shadow of the house, looking towards Snakes Island. There were two things about Mardykes he specially disliked.

One was Philip Feltram, who, right or wrong, he fancied knew more than was pleasant of his past life.

The other was the lake. It was a beautiful piece of water, his eye, educated at least in the excellences of landscape-painting, acknowledged. But although he could pull a good oar, and liked other lakes, to this particular sheet of water there lurked within him an insurmountable antipathy. It was engendered by a variety of associations.

There is a faculty in man that will acknowledge the unseen. He may scout and scare religion from him; but if he does, superstition

perches near. His boding was made-up of omens, dreams, and such stuff as he most affected to despise, and there fluttered at his heart a presentiment and disgust.

His foot was on the gunwale of the boat, that was chained to its ring at the margin; but he would not have crossed that water in it for any reason that man could urge.

What was the mischief that sooner or later was to befall him from that lake, he could not define; but that some fatal danger lurked there, was the one idea concerning it that had possession of his fancy.

He was now looking along its still waters, towards the copse and rocks of Snakes Island, thinking of Philip Feltram; and the yellow level sunbeams touched his dark features, that bore a saturnine resemblance to those of Charles II., and marked sharply their firm grim lines, and left his deep-set eyes in shadow.

Who has the happy gift to seize the present, as a child does, and live in it? Who is not often looking far off for his happiness, as Sidney Smith says, like a man looking for his hat when it is upon his head? Sir Bale was brooding over his double hatred, of Feltram and of the lake. It would have been better had he struck down the raven that croaked upon his shoulder, and listened to the harmless birds that were whistling all round among the branches in the golden sunset.

Chapter VIII.

FELTRAM'S PLAN.

This horror of the beautiful lake, which other people thought so lovely, was, in that mind which affected to scoff at the unseen, a distinct creation of downright superstition.

The nursery tales which had scared him in his childhood were founded on the tragedy of Snakes Island, and haunted him with an unavowed persistence still. Strange dreams untold had visited him, and a German conjurer, who had made some strangely successful vaticinations, had told him that his worst enemy would come to him from a lake. He had heard very nearly the same thing from a fortune-teller in France; and once at Lucerne, when he was waiting alone in his room for the hour at which he had appointed to go upon the lake, all being quiet, there came to the window, which was open, a sunburnt, lean, wicked face. Its ragged owner leaned his arm on the window-frame, and with his head in the room, said in his patois, 'Ho! waiting are you? You'll have enough of the lake one day. Don't you mind watching; they'll send for you, my friend, when you're wanted;' and twisting his yellow face into a malicious distortion, he went on.

This thing had occurred so suddenly, and chimed-in so oddly

with his thoughts, which were at that moment at distant Mardykes and the haunted lake, that it disconcerted him. He laughed, he looked out of the window. He would have given that fellow money to tell him why he said that. But there was no good in looking for the scamp; he was gone.

A memory not preoccupied with that lake and its omens, and a presentiment about himself, would not have noted such things. But *his* mind they touched indelibly; and he was ashamed of his childish slavery, but could not help it.

The foundation of all this had been laid in the nursery, in the winter's tales told by its fireside, and which seized upon his fancy and his fears with a strange congeniality.

There is a large bedroom at Mardykes Hall, which tradition assigns to the lady who had perished tragically in the lake. Mrs. Julaper was sure of it; for her aunt, who died a very old woman twenty years before, remembered the time of the lady's death, and when she grew to woman's estate had opportunity in abundance; for the old people who surrounded her could remember forty years farther back, and tell everything connected with the old house in beautiful Miss Feltram's time.

This large old-fashioned room, commanding a view of Snakes Island, the fells, and the lake—somewhat vast and gloomy, and furnished in a stately old fashion—was said to be haunted, especially when the wind blew from the direction of Golden Friars, the point from which it blew on the night of her death in the lake; or when the sky was overcast, and thunder rolled among the lofty fells, and lightning gleamed blue on the wide sheet of water.

It was on a night like this that a lady visitor, who long after that event occupied, in entire ignorance of its supernatural character, that large room; and being herself a lady of a picturesque turn, and loving the grander melodrama of Nature, bid her maid leave the shutters open, and watched the splendid effects from her bed, until, the storm being still distant, she fell asleep.

It was travelling slowly across the lake, and it was the deep-mouthed clangor of its near approach that startled her, at dead of night, from her slumber, to witness the same phenomena in the tremendous loudness and brilliancy of their near approach.

At this magnificent spectacle she was looking with the awful ecstasy of an observer in whom the sense of danger is subordinated to that of the sublime, when there came suddenly to the window a woman dishevelled, loosely clothed, and whose long hair and dress seemed drenched with water. She was gazing into the room with great eyes that seemed distended and wild with terror, and was shaking the sash of the window with an imploring vehemence that seemed to supplicate shelter. Having stood there for a few seconds, and before the lady who beheld all this from her bed could make up

her mind what to do, the storm-beaten woman, wringing her hands, went swiftly away.

Possessed with the idea that she had seen some poor woman overtaken in the storm, who, failing to procure admission there, had gone round to some of the many doors of the mansion, and obtained an entry there, she again fell asleep.

It was not till the morning, when she went to her window to look out upon the now tranquil scene, that she discovered what, being a stranger to the house, she had quite forgotten, that this room was at a great height—some thirty feet—from the ground.

Another story was that of good old Mr. Randal Rymer, who was often a visitor at the house in the late Lady Mardykes' day. In his youth he had been a campaigner; and now that he was a preacher he maintained his hardy habits, and always slept, summer and winter, with a bit of his window up. Being in that room in his bed, and after a short sleep lying awake, the moon shining softly through the window, there passed by that aperture into the room a figure dressed, it seemed to him, in gray that was nearly white. It passed straight to the hearth, where was an expiring wood fire; and cowering over it with outstretched hands, it appeared to be cold and shivering, and gathering what little heat was to be had. Mr. Rymer, amazed and awestruck, made a movement in his bed; and the figure gave one look round, with large eyes that in the moonlight looked like melting snow, and stretching its long arms up the chimney, they and the figure itself seemed to blend with the smoke, and so pass up and away.

Sir Bale, I have said, did not like Feltram. His father, Sir William, had left a letter creating a trust, it was said, in favour of Philip Feltram. The document had been found with the will, addressed to Sir Bale in the form of a letter.

'That is mine,' said the Baronet, when it dropped out of the will; and he slipped it into his pocket, and no one ever saw it after.

But Mr. Charles Twyne, the attorney of Golden Friars, whenever he got drunk, which was pretty often, used to tell his friends with a grave wink that he knew a thing or two about that letter. It gave Philip Feltram two hundred a-year, charged on Harfax. It was only a direction. It made Sir Bale a trustee, however; and having made away with the 'letter,' the Baronet had been robbing Philip Feltram ever since.

Old Twyne was cautious, even in his cups, in his choice of an audience, and was a little enigmatical in his revelations. For he was afraid of Sir Bale, though he hated him for employing a lawyer who lived seven miles away, and was a rival of old Twyne's. So people were not quite sure whether Mr. Twyne was telling lies or truth, and the principal fact that corroborated his story was Sir

Bale's manifest hatred of his secretary. In fact, Sir Bale's retaining him in his house, detesting him as he seemed to do, was not easily to be accounted for, except on the principle of a tacit compromise—a miserable compensation for having robbed him of his rights.

The battle about the bank-note proceeded. Sir Bale certainly had doubts, and vacillated; for moral evidence made powerfully in favour of poor Feltram, though the evidence of circumstance made as powerfully against him. But Sir Bale admitted suspicion easily, and in weighing probabilities would count a virtue very lightly against temptation and opportunity; and whatever his doubts might sometimes be, he resisted and quenched them, and never let that ungrateful scoundrel Philip Feltram so much as suspect their existence.

For two days Sir Bale had not spoken to Feltram. He passed him by on stair and passage, carrying his head high, and with a thundrous countenance, rolling conclusions and revenges in his soul.

Poor Feltram all this time existed in one long agony. He would have left Mardykes, were it not that he looked vaguely to some just power—to chance itself—against this hideous imputation. To go with this indictment ringing in his ears, would amount to a confession and flight.

Mrs. Julaper consoled him with might and main. She was a sympathetic and trusting spirit, and knew poor Philip Feltram, in her simplicity, better than the shrewdest profligate on earth could have known him. She cried with him in his misery. She was fired with indignation by these suspicions, and still more at what followed.

Sir Bale showed no signs of relenting. It might have been that he was not very sorry that so unexceptionable an opportunity of getting rid of Feltram, who, people thought, knew something about him which it galled the Baronet's pride that he should know.

The Baronet had another shorter and sterner interview with Feltram in his study. The result was, that unless he restored the missing note before ten o'clock next morning, he should leave Mardykes.

To leave Mardykes was no more than Philip Feltram, feeble as he was of will, had already resolved. But what was to become of him? He did not very much care, if he could find any calling, however humble, that would just give him bread.

There was an old fellow and his wife (an ancient dame), who lived at the other side of the lake, on the old territories of the Feltrams, and who, from some tradition of loyalty, perhaps, were fond of poor Philip Feltram. They lived somewhat high up on the fells—about as high as trees would grow—and those which were clumped about their rude dwelling were nearly the last you passed in your ascent of the mountain. These people had a multitude of sheep and goats, and lived in their airy solitude a pastoral and simple life,

and were childless. Philip Feltram was hardy and active, having passed his early days among that arduous scenery. Cold and rain did not trouble him; and these people being wealthy in their way, and loving him, would be glad to find him employment of that desultory pastoral kind which would best suit him.

This vague idea was the only thing resembling a plan in his mind.

When Philip Feltram came to Mrs. Julaper's room, and told her that he had made up his mind to leave the house forthwith—to cross the lake to the Cloostedd side in Tom Marlin's boat, and then to make his way up the hill alone to Trebeck's lonely farmstead, Mrs. Julaper was overwhelmed.

'Ye'll do no such thing to-night, anyhow. You're not to go like that. Ye'll come into the small room here, where he can't follow; and we'll sit down and talk it over a bit, and ye'll find 'twill all come straight; and this will be no night, anyhow, for such a march. Why, man, 'twould take an hour and more to cross the lake, and then a long uphill walk before ye could reach Trebeck's place; and if the night should fall while you were still on the mountain, ye might lose your life among the rocks. It can't be 'tis come to that yet; and the call was in the air, I'm told, all yesterday, and distant thunder to-day, travelling this way over Blarwyn Fells; and 'twill be a night no one will be out, much less on the mountain side.'

Chapter IX.

THE CRAZY PARSON.

Mrs. Julaper had grown weather-wise, living for so long among this noble and solitary scenery, where people must observe Nature or else nothing—where signs of coming storm or change are almost local, and record themselves on particular headlands and mountain-peaks, or in the mists, or in mirrored tints of the familiar lake, and are easily learned or remembered. At all events, her presage proved true too.

The sun had set an hour and more. It was dark; and an awful thunder-storm, whose march, like the distant reverberations of an invading army, had been faintly heard beyond the barriers of Blarwyn Fells throughout the afternoon, was near them now, and had burst in deep-mouthed battle among the ravines at the other side, and over the broad lake, that glared like a sheet of burnished steel under its flashes of dazzling blue. Wild and fitful blasts sweeping down the hollows and cloughs of the fells of Golden Friars agitated the lake, and bent the trees low, and whirled away their sere leaves in melancholy drift in their tremendous gusts. And from the window, looking on a scene enveloped in more than the darkness of night, you saw

in the pulsations of the lightning, 'before the speedy gleams the darkness swallowed,' the tossing trees and the flying foam and eddies on the lake.

In the midst of the hurlyburly, a loud and long knocking came at the hall-door of Mardykes. How long it had lasted before a chance lull made it audible I do not know.

There was nothing picturesquely poor, any more than there were evidences of wealth, anywhere in Sir Bale Mardykes' household. He had no lack of servants, but they were of an inexpensive and homely sort; and the hall-door being opened by the son of an old tenant on the estate—the tempest beating on the other side of the house, and comparative shelter under the gables at the front—he saw standing before him, in the agitated air, a thin old man, who muttering, it might be, a benediction, stepped into the hall, and displayed long silver tresses, just as the storm had blown them, ascetic and eager features, and a pair of large light eyes that wandered wildly. He was dressed thinly, in threadbare black; a pair of long leather gaiters, buckled high above his knee, protected his thin shanks through moss and pool; and the singularity of his appearance was heightened by a wide-leafed felt hat, over which he had tied his handkerchief, so as to bring the leaf of it over his ears, and to secure it from being whirled from his head by the storm.

This odd and storm-beaten figure—tall, and a little stooping, as well as thin—was not unknown to the servant, who saluted him with something of fear as well as of respect as he bid him reverently welcome, and asked him to come in and sit by the fire.

'Get you to your master, and tell him I have a message to him from one he has not seen for two-and-forty years.'

As the old man, with his harsh old voice, thus spoke, he unknotted his handkerchief and beat the dust and rain-drops from his hat upon his knee.

The servant knocked at the library-door, where he found Sir Bale.

'Well, what's the matter?' cried Sir Bale sharply, from his chair before the fire, with angry eyes looking over his shoulder.

'Here's 't sir cumman, Sir Bale,' he answered.

'Sir,' or 'the Sir,' is still used as the clergyman's title in the Northumbrian counties.

'What sir?'

'Sir Hugh Creswell, if you please, Sir Bale.'

'Ho!—mad Creswell?—O, the crazy parson. Well, tell Mrs. Julaper to let him have some supper—and—and to let him have a bed in some suitable place. That's what he wants. These mad fellows know what they are about.'

'No, Sir Bale Mardykes, that is not what he wants,' said the loud wild voice of the daft sir over the servant's shoulder. 'Often

has Mardykes Hall given me share of its cheer and its shelter and the warmth of its fire; and I bless the house that has been an inn to the wayfarer of the Lord. But to-night I go up the lake to Pindar's Bield, three miles on; and there I rest and refresh—not here.'

'And why not *here*, Mr. Creswell?' asked the Baronet; for about this crazy old man, who preached in the fields, and appeared and disappeared so suddenly in the orbit of his wide and unknown perambulations of those northern and border counties, there was that sort of superstitious feeling which attaches to the mysterious and the good—an idea that it was lucky to harbour and dangerous to offend him. No one knew whence he came or whither he went. Once in a year, perhaps, he might appear at a lonely farmstead door among the fells, salute the house, enter, and be gone in the morning. His life was austere; his piety enthusiastic, severe, and tinged with the craze which inspired among the rustic population a sort of awe.

'I'll not sleep at Mardykes to-night; neither will I eat, nor drink, nor sit me down—no, nor so much as stretch my hands to the fire. As the man of God came out of Judah to king Jeroboam, so come I to you, sent by a vision, to bear a warning; and as he said, "If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place," so also say I.'

'Do as you please,' said Sir Bale, a little sulkily. 'Say your say; and you are welcome to stay or go, if go you will on so mad a night as this.'

'Leave us,' said Creswell, beckoning the servant back with his thin hands; 'what I have to say is to your master.'

The servant went, in obedience to a gesture from Sir Bale, and shut the door.

The old man drew nearer to the Baronet, and lowering his loud stern voice a little, and interrupting his discourse from time to time, to allow the near thunder-peals to subside, he said,

'Answer me, Sir Bale—what is this that has chanced between you and Philip Feltram?'

The Baronet, under the influence of that blunt and peremptory demand, told him shortly and sternly enough.

'And of all these facts you are sure, else ye would not blast your early companion and kinsman with the name of thief?'

'I *am* sure,' said Sir Bale grimly.

'Unlock that cabinet,' said the old man with the long white locks.

'I've no objection,' said Sir Bale; and he did unlock an old oak cabinet that stood, carved in high relief with strange figures and gothic grotesques, against the wall, opposite the fireplace. On

opening it there were displayed a system of little drawers and pigeon-holes such as we see in more modern escritoires.

'Open that drawer with the red mark of a seal upon it,' continued Hugh Creswell, pointing to it with his lank finger.

Sir Bale did so; and to his momentary amazement, and even consternation, there lay the missing note, which now, with one of those sudden caprices of memory which depend on the laws of suggestion and association, he remembered having placed there with his own hand.

'That is it,' said old Creswell with a pallid smile, and fixing his wild eyes on the Baronet. The smile subsided into a frown, and said he: 'Last night I slept near Haworth Moss; and your father came to me in a dream, and said: "My son Bale accuses Philip of having stolen a bank-note from his desk. He forgets that he himself placed it in his cabinet. Come with me." I was, in the spirit, in this room; and he led me to this cabinet, which he opened; and in that drawer he showed me that note. "Go," said he, "and tell him to ask Philip Feltram's pardon, else he will but go in weakness to return in power;" and he said that which it is not lawful to repeat. My message is told. Now, a word from myself,' he added sternly. 'The dead, through my lips, has spoken, and under God's thunder and lightning his words have found ye. Why so uppish wi' Philip Feltram? See how ye threaped, and yet were wrong. He's no tazzle—he's no taggelt. *Mind* ye ask his pardon. Ye must change, or he will change. Go in weakness, come in power: mark ye the words. 'Twill make a peal that will be heard in toon and desert, in the swirls o' the mountain, through pikes and valleys, and mak' a waaly man o' thee.'

The old man with these words, uttered in the broad northern dialect of his common speech, strode from the room and shut the door. In another minute he was forth into the storm, pursuing what remained of his long march to Pindar's Bield.

'Upon my soul!' said Sir Bale, recovering from the sort of stun which the sudden and strange visit had left, 'that's a cool old fellow! Come to rate me and teach me my own business in my own house!' and he rapped out a fierce oath. 'Change his mind or no, here he sha'n't stay to-night—not an hour.'

Sir Bale was in the lobby in a moment, and thundered to his servants:

'I say, put that impudent fool out of the door—put him out by the shoulder, and never let him get his foot inside it more!'

But the old man's yea was yea, and his nay nay. He had quite meant what he said; and, as I related, was beyond the reach of the indignity of extrusion.

Sir Bale on his return shut his door as violently as if it were in the face of the old prophet.

'Ask Feltram's pardon indeed! For what? Why, any jury on earth would have hanged him on half the evidence; and I, like a fool, was going to let him off with his liberty and my hundred pounds! Ask his pardon indeed!'

Still there were misgivings in his mind; a consciousness that he did owe explanation and apology to Feltram, and an insurmountable reluctance to undertake either. The old dislike—a contempt mingled with fear—not any fear of his malevolence, a fear only of his carelessness and folly; for, as I have said, Feltram knew many things, it was believed, of the Baronet's continental and Asiatic life, and had even gently remonstrated with him upon the dangers into which he was running. A simple fellow like Philip Feltram is a dangerous depositary of a secret. This Baronet was proud, too; and the mere possession of his secrets by Feltram was an involuntary insult, which Sir Bale could not forgive. He wished him far away; and except for the recovery of his bank-note, which he could ill spare, he was sorry that this suspicion was cleared up.

The thunder and storm were unabated; it seemed indeed that they were growing wilder and more awful.

He opened the window-shutter and looked out upon that sublimest of scenes; and so intense and magnificent were its phenomena, that Sir Bale was for a while absorbed in this contemplation.

When he turned about, the sight of his 100*l*. note, still between his finger and thumb, made him smile grimly.

The more he thought of it, the clearer it was that he could not leave matters as they were. Well, what should he do? He would send for Mrs. Julaper, and tell her vaguely that he had changed his mind about Feltram, and that he might continue to stay at Mardykes Hall as usual. That would suffice. She could speak to Feltram.

He sent for her; and soon, in the lulls of the great uproar without, he could hear the jingle of Mrs. Julaper's keys and her light tread upon the lobby.

'Mrs. Julaper,' said the Baronet in his dry careless way, 'Feltram may remain; your eloquence has prevailed. What have you been crying about?' he asked, observing that his housekeeper's usually cheerful face was, in her own phrase, 'all cried.'

'It is too late, sir; he's gone.'

'And when did he go?' asked Sir Bale, a little put out. 'He chose an odd evening, didn't he? So like him!'

'He went about half an hour ago; and I'm very sorry, sir; it's a sore sight to see the poor lad going from the place he was reared in, and a hard thing, sir; and on such a night, above all.'

'No one asked him to go to-night. Where is he gone to?'

'I don't know, I'm sure; he left my room, sir, when I was upstairs; and Janet saw him pass the window not ten minutes after Mr. Creswell left the house.'

'Well, then, there's no good, Mrs. Julaper, in thinking more about it; he has settled the matter his own way; and as he so ordains it—amen, say I. Good-night.'

Chapter X.

ADVENTURE IN TOM MARLIN'S BOAT.

Philip Feltram was liked very well—a gentle, kindly, and very timid creature, and, before he became so heart-broken, a fellow who liked a joke or a pleasant story, and could laugh heartily. Where will Sir Bale find so unresisting and respectful a butt and retainer? and whom will he bully now?

Something like remorse was troubling Sir Bale's heart a little; and the more he thought on the strange visit of Hugh Creswell that night, with its unexplained menace, the more uneasy he became.

The storm continued; and even to him there seemed something exaggerated and inhuman in the severity of his expulsion on such a night. It was his own doing, it was true; but would people believe that? and would he have thought of leaving Mardykes at all if it had not been for his kinsman's cruelty? Nay, was it not certain that if Sir Bale had done as Hugh Creswell had urged him, and sent for Feltram forthwith, and told him how all had been cleared up, and been a little friendly with him, he would have found him still in the house?—for he had not yet gone for ten minutes after Creswell's departure, and thus all that was to follow might have been averted. But it was now too late, and Sir Bale would let the affair take its own course.

Below him, outside the window at which he stood ruminating, he heard voices mingling with the storm. He could with tolerable certainty perceive, looking into the obscurity, that there were three men passing close under it, carrying some very heavy burden among them.

He did not know what these three black figures in the obscurity were about. He saw them pass round the corner of the building toward the front, and in the lulls of the storm could hear their gruff voices talking.

We have all experienced what a presentiment is, and we all know with what an intuition the faculty of observation is sometimes heightened. It was such an apprehension as sometimes gives its peculiar horror to a dream—a sort of knowledge that what those people were about was in a dreadful way connected with his own fate.

He watched for a time, thinking that they might return; but they did not. He was very uncomfortable, and in a state of suspense.

'If they want me, they won't have much trouble in finding me, nor any scruple in plaguing me; they never have.'

Sir Bale returned to his letters, a score of which he was that

night getting off his conscience—an arrear which would not have troubled him had he not ceased, for two or three days, altogether to employ Philip Feltram, who had been accustomed to take all that sort of drudgery off his hands.

All the time he was writing now he had a feeling that the shadows he had seen pass under his window were machinating some trouble for him, and an uncomfortable suspense made him lift his eyes now and then to the door, fancying sounds and footsteps; and after a resultless wait he would say to himself, 'If any one is coming, why the devil don't they come?' and apply himself again to his letters.

But on a sudden he heard good Mrs. Julaper's step trotting along the lobby, and the tiny ringing of her keys.

Here was news coming; and the Baronet stood up looking at the door, on which presently came a hurried rapping; and before he had answered, in the midst of an awful thunder-clap that suddenly broke, rattling over the house, the good woman opened the door in great agitation, and cried with a tremulous uplifting of her hands,

'O, Sir Bale! O, la, sir! here's poor dear Philip Feltram come home drowned!'

Sir Bale stared at her sternly for some seconds.

'Come, now, do be distinct,' said Sir Bale; 'what has happened?'

'He's lying on the sofer in the old still-room. You never saw —my God!—O, sir—what is life?'

'D—n it, can't you cry by and by, and tell me what's the matter *now?*'

'A bit o' fire there, as luck would have it; but what is hot or cold now? La, sir, they're all doin' what they can, and Tom Warren is on the gallop down to Golden Friars for Doctor Torvey.'

'*Is* he drowned, or is it only a ducking? Come, bring me to the place. Dead men don't usually want a fire, or consult doctors. I'll see for myself.'

So Sir Bale Mardykes, pale and grim, accompanied by the light-footed Mrs. Julaper, strode along the passages, and was led by her into the old still-room, which had ceased to be used for its original purpose. All the servants in the house were now collected there, and three men also who lived by the margin of the lake; one of them thoroughly drenched, with rivulets of water still trickling from his sleeves, water down the wrinkles and pockets of his waistcoat and from the feet of his trousers, and pumping and oozing from his shoes, and streaming from his hair down the channels of his cheeks like a continuous rain of tears.

The people drew back a little as Sir Bale entered with a quick step and a sharp pallid frown on his face. There was a silence as he stooped over Philip Feltram, who lay on a low bed next the wall, dimly lighted by two or three candles here and there about the room.

He laid his hand, for a moment, on his cold wet breast.

Sir Bale knew what should be done in order to give a man in such a case his last chance for life. Everybody was speedily put in motion. Philip's drenched clothes were removed, hot blankets enveloped him, warming-pans and hot bricks lent their aid; he was placed at the prescribed angle, so that water flowed freely from his mouth. The old expedient for inducing artificial breathing was employed, and a lusty pair of kitchen bellows did duty for his lungs.

But these helps to life, and suggestions to nature, availed not. Forlorn and peaceful lay the features of poor Philip Feltram; cold and dull to the touch; no breath through the blue lips; no sight in the fish-like eyes; pulseless and cold in the midst of all the hot bricks and warming-pans about him.

At length, everything having been tried, Sir Bale, who had been directing, placed his hand within the clothes, and laid it silently on Philip's shoulder and over his heart; and after a little wait, he shook his head, and looking down on his sunken face, he said,

'I'm afraid he's gone. Yes, he's gone, poor fellow! And bear you this in mind, all of you; Mrs. Julaper there can tell you more about it. She knows that it was certainly in no compliance with my wish that he left the house to-night: it was his own obstinate perversity, and perhaps—I forgive him for it—a wish in his unreasonable resentment to throw some odium upon this house, as having refused him shelter on such a night, than which imputation nothing can be more utterly false. Mrs. Julaper there knows how welcome he was to stay the night; but he would not; he had made up his mind, it seems, without telling any person. Had he told you, Mrs. Julaper?'

'No, sir,' sobbed Mrs. Julaper from the centre of a pocket-handkerchief in which her face was buried.

'Not a human being: an angry whim of his own. Poor Feltram! and here's the result,' said the Baronet. 'We have done our best—done everything. I don't think the doctor, when he comes, will say that anything has been omitted; but all won't do. Does any one here know how it happened?'

Two men knew very well—the man who had been ducked, and his companion, a younger man, who was also in the still-room, and had lent a hand in carrying Feltram up to the house.

Tom Marlin had a queer old stone tenement by the edge of the lake just under Mardykes Hall. Some people said it was the stump of an old tower that had once belonged to Mardykes Castle, of which in the modern building scarcely a relic was discoverable.

This Tom Marlin had an ancient right of fishing in the lake, where he caught pike enough for all Golden Friars; and keeping a couple of boats, he made money beside by ferrying passengers over now and then. This fellow, with a furrowed face and shaggy eye-

brows, bald at top, but with long grizzled locks falling upon his shoulders, said,

'He wer wi' me this mornin', sayin' he'd want t' boat to cross the lake in, but he didn't say what hour; and when it came on to thunder and blow like this, ye may guess I did not look to see him to-night. Well, my wife was just lightin' a pig-tail—tho' light enough and to spare there was in the lift already—when who should come clatterin' at the latch-pin in the blow o' wind and thunder but Philip, poor lad, himself; and an ill hour for him it was. He's been some time in ill fettle, though he was never frowsy, not he, but always kind and dooce, and canty once, like anither; and he asked me to take the boat across the lake at once to the Clough o' Cloostedd at t'other side. The woman took the pet and wodn't hear o't; and, "Dall me, if I go to-night," quoth I. But he would not be put off so, not he; and ding-drive he went to it, cryin' and putrein', ye'd a-said, poor fellow, he was wrang i' his garrets a'most. So at long last I bethought me, there's nout o' a sea to the north o' Snakes Island, so I'll pull him by that side—for the storm is blowin' right up by Golden Friars, ye mind—and when we get near the point, thinks I, he'll see wi' his een how the lake is, and gie it up. For I liked him, poor lad; and seein' he'd set his heart on't, I wouldn't vex him, nor frump him wi' a no. So down we three—myself, and Bill there, and Philip Feltram—come to the boat; and we pulled out, keeping Snakes Island atwixt us and the wind. 'Twas smooth water wi'us, for 'twas a scug there, but white enough was all beyont the point; and passing the finger-stone, not forty fathom from the shore o' the island, Bill and me pullin' and he sittin' in the stern, poor lad, up he rises, a bit rabblin' to himself, wi' his hands lifted so.'

"Look a-head!" says I, thinkin' something was comin' atort us.

'But 'twasn't that. The boat was quiet, for while we looked oo'er our shouthers oo'er her bows, we didn't pull, so she lay still; and lookin' back again on Philip, he was rabblin' on all the same.

"It's nobbut a prass wi' himsel', poor lad," thinks I.

'But that wasn't it neither; for I sid something white come out o' t'water, by the gunwale, like a hand. By Jen! and he leans oo'er and tuk it; and he sagged like, and so it drew him in, under the mere, before I cud du nout. There was nout to thraa tu him, and no time; down he went, and I followed; and thrice I dived before I found him, and brought him up by the hair at last; and there he is, poor lad! and all one if he lay at the bottom o' t' mere.'

As Tom Marlin ended his narrative—often interrupted by the noise of the tempest without, and the peals of thunder that echoed awfully above, like the chorus of a melancholy ballad—the sudden clang of the hall-door bell, and a more faintly-heard knocking, announced a new arrival.

Chapter XI.

SIR BALE'S DREAM.

It was Doctor Torvey who entered the old still-room now, buttoned-up to the chin in his greatcoat, and with a muffler of many colours wrapped partly over that feature.

'Well!—hey? So poor Feltram's had an accident?'

The Doctor was addressing Sir Bale, and getting to the bedside as he pulled off his gloves.

'I see you've been keeping him warm—that's right; and a considerable flow of water from the mouth; turn him a little that way. Hey? O, ho!' said the Doctor, as he placed his hand upon Philip, and gently stirred his limbs. 'It's more than an hour since this happened. I'm afraid there's very little to be done now;' and in a lower tone, with his hand on poor Philip Feltram's arm, and so down to his fingers, he said in Sir Bale Mardyke's ear, with a shake of his head,

'Here, you see, poor fellow, here's the cadaveric stiffness; it's very melancholy, but it's all over, he's gone; there's no good trying any more.—Come here, Mrs. Julaper. Did you ever see any one dead? Look at his eyes, look at his mouth. You ought to have known that, with half an eye.—And you know,' he added again confidentially in Sir Bale's ear, 'trying anything more *now* is all my eye.'

Then after a few more words with the Baronet, and having heard his narrative, he said from time to time, 'Quite right; nothing could be better; capital practice, sir,' and so forth. And at the close of all this, amid the sobs of kind Mrs. Julaper and the general whimpering of the humbler handmaids, the Doctor standing by the bed, with his knuckles on the coverlet, and a glance now and then on the dead face beside him, said—by way of 'quieting men's minds,' as the old tract-writers used to say—a few words to the following effect:

'Everything has been done here that the most experienced physician could have wished. Everything has been done in the best way. I don't know anything that has not been done, in fact. If I had been here myself, I don't know—hot bricks—salt isn't a bad thing. I don't know, I say, that anything of any consequence has been omitted.' And looking at the body, 'You see,' and he drew the fingers a little this way and that, letting them return, as they stiffly did, to their former attitude, 'you may be sure that the poor gentleman was quite dead by the time he arrived here. So, since he was laid there, nothing has been lost by delay.—And, Sir Bale, if you have any directions to send to Golden Friars, sir, I shall be most happy to undertake your message.

'Nothing, thanks; it is a melancholy ending, poor fellow! You

must come to the study with me, Doctor Torvey, and talk a little bit more; and—very sad, doctor—and you must have a glass of sherry, or some port—the port used not to be bad here; I don't take it—but very melancholy it is—bring port and sherry; and, Mrs. Julaper, you'll be good enough to see that everything that should be done here is looked to; and let Marlin and the men have supper and something to drink. You have been too long in your wet clothes, Marlin.'

So, with gracious words all round, he led the Doctor to the library where he had been sitting, and was affable and hospitable, and told him his own version of all that had passed between him and Philip Feltram, and presented himself in an amiable point of view, and pleased the Doctor with his port and flatteries—for he could not afford to lose any one's good word just now; and the Doctor was a bit of a gossip, and in most houses in that region, in one character or another, every three months in the year.

So in due time the Doctor drove back to Golden Friars, with a high opinion of Sir Bale, and higher still of his port, and highest of all of himself: in the best possible humour with the world, not minding the storm that blew in his face, and which he defied in good-humoured mock-heroics spoken in somewhat thick accents, and regarding the thunder and lightning as a lively gala of fire-works; and if there had been a chance of finding his cronies still in the George and Dragon, he would have been among them forthwith, to relate the tragedy of the night, and tell what a good fellow, after all, Sir Bale was; and what a fool, at best, poor Philip Feltram.

But the George was quiet for that night. The thunder rolled over voiceless chambers; and the lights had been put out within the windows, on whose multitudinous small panes the lightning glared. So the Doctor went home to Mrs. Torvey, whom he charmed into good-humoured curiosity by the tale of wonder he had to relate.

Sir Bale's qualms were symptomatic of something a little less sublime and more selfish than conscience. He was not sorry that Philip Feltram was out of the way. His lips might begin to babble inconveniently at any time, and why should not his mouth be stopped? and what stopper so effectual as that plug of clay which fate had introduced? But he did not want to be charged with the odium of the catastrophe. Every man cares something for the opinion of his fellows. And seeing that Feltram had been well liked, and that his death had excited a vehement commiseration, Sir Bale did not wish it to be said that he had made the house too hot to hold him, and had so driven him to extremity.

Sir Bale's first agitation had subsided. It was now late, he had written many letters, and he was tired. It was not wonderful, then, that having turned his lounging-chair to the fire, he should have fallen asleep in it, as at last he did.

The storm was passing gradually away by this time. The thunder was now echoing among the distant glens and gorges of Daulness Fells, and the angry roar and gusts of the tempest were subsiding into the melancholy soughing and piping that soothe like a lullaby.

Sir Bale therefore had his unpremeditated sleep very comfortably, except that his head was hanging a little uneasily; which, perhaps, helped him to this dream.

It was one of those dreams in which the continuity of the waking state that immediately preceded it seems unbroken; for he thought that he was sitting in the chair which he occupied, and in the room where he actually was. It seemed to him that he got up, took a candle in his hand, and went through the passages to the old still-room where Philip Feltram lay. The house seemed perfectly still. He could hear the chirp of the crickets faintly from the distant kitchen, and the tick of the clock sounded loud and hollow along the passage. In the old still-room, as he opened the door, was no light, except what was admitted from the candle he carried. He found the body of poor Philip Feltram just as he had left it—his gentle face, saddened by the touch of death, was turned upwards, with white lips; with traces of suffering fixed in its outlines, such as caused Sir Bale, standing by the bed, to draw the coverlet over the dead man's features, which seemed silently to upbraid him. 'Gone in weakness!' said Sir Bale, repeating the words of the 'daft sir,' Hugh Creswell; and as he did so, a voice whispered near him, with a great sigh, 'Come in power!' He looked round, in his dream, but there was no one; the light seemed to fail, and a horror slowly overcame him, especially as he thought he saw the figure under the coverlet stealthily beginning to move. Backing towards the door, for he could not take his eyes off it, he saw something like a huge black ape creep out at the foot of the bed; and springing at him, it griped him by the throat, so that he could not breathe; and a thousand voices were instantly round him, holloaing, cursing, laughing in his ears; and in this direful plight he waked.

Was it the ring of those voices still in his ears, or a real shriek, and another, and a long peal, shriek after shriek, swelling madly through the distant passages, that held him still, freezing in the horror of his dream?

I will tell you what this noise was.

Chapter XII.

MARCELLA BLIGH AND JUDITH WALE KEEP WATCH.

After his bottle of port with Sir Bale, the Doctor had gone down again to the room where poor Philip Feltram lay.

Mrs. Julaper had dried her eyes, and was busy by this time;

and two old women were making all their arrangements for a night-watch by the body, which they had washed, and, as their phrase goes, 'laid out' in the humble bed where it had lain while there was still a hope that a spark sufficient to rekindle the fire of life might remain. These old women had points of resemblance: they were lean, sallow, and wonderfully wrinkled, and looked each malign and ugly enough for a witch.

Marcella Bligh's thin hooked nose was now like the beak of a bird of prey over the face of the drowned man, upon whose eyelids she was placing penny-pieces, to keep them from opening; and her one eye was fixed on her work, its sightless companion showing white in its socket, with an ugly leer.

Judith Wale was lifting the pail of hot-water with which they had just washed the body. She had long lean arms, a hunched back, a great sharp chin sunk on her hollow breast, and small eyes restless as a ferret's; and she clattered about in great bowls of shoes, old and clouted, that were made for a foot as big as two of hers.

The Doctor knew these two old women, who were often employed in such dismal offices.

'How does Mrs. Bligh? See me with half an eye? Hey—that's rhyme, isn't it?—And, Judy lass—why, I thought you lived nearer the town—here making poor Mr. Feltram's last toilet. You have helped to dress many a poor fellow for his last journey. Not a bad notion of drill either—they stand at attention stiff and straight enough in the sentry-box. Your recruits do you credit, Mrs. Wale.'

The Doctor stood at the foot of the bed to inspect, breathing forth a vapour of very fine old port, his hands in his pockets, speaking with a lazy thickness, and looking so comfortable and facetious, that Mrs. Julaper would have liked to turn him out of the room.

But the Doctor was not unkind, only extremely comfortable. He was a good-natured fellow, and had thought and care for the living, but not a great deal of sentiment for the dead, whom he had looked in the face too often to be much disturbed by the spectacle.

'You'll have to keep that bandage on. You should be sharp; you should know all about it, girl, by this time, and not let those muscles stiffen. I need not tell you the mouth shuts as easily as this snuff-box, if you only take it in time.—I suppose, Mrs. Julaper, you'll send to Jos Fringer for the poor fellow's outfit. Fringer is a very proper man—there ain't a properer und-aker in England. I always re-mmend Fringer—in Church-street in Golden Friars. You know Fringer, I daresay.'

'I can't say, sir, I'm sure. That will be as Sir Bale may please to direct,' answered Mrs. Julaper.

'You've got him very straight, straighter than I thought you could; but the large joints were not so stiff. A very little longer wait, and you'd hardly have got him into his coffin. He'll want a

vr-r-ry long one, poor lad. Short cake is life, ma'am. Sad thing this. They'll open their eyes, I promise you, down in the town. 'Twill be cool enough, I'd shay, affre all th-thunr-thunnle, you know. I think I'll take a nip, Mrs. Jool-fr, if you wouldn't mine makin' me out a thimmle-ful bran-band-bran-rand-andy, eh, Mishs Joolfr?'

And the Doctor took a chair by the fire; and Mrs. Julaper, with a dubious conscience and dry hospitality, procured the brandy-flask and wine-glass, and helped the physician in a thin hesitating stream, which left him ample opportunity to cry 'Hold—enough!' had he been so minded. But that able physician had no confidence, it would seem, in any dose under a bumper, which he sipped with commendation, and then fell asleep with the firelight on his face—to tender-hearted Mrs. Julaper's disgust—and snored with a sensual disregard of the solemnity of his situation; until with a profound nod, or rather dive, toward the fire, he awoke, got up and shook his ears with a kind of start, and standing with his back to the fire, asked for his muffler and horse; and so took his leave of the weird sisters, who were still pottering about the body, with croak and whisper, and nod and ogle. He took his leave also of good Mrs. Julaper, who was completing arrangements with teapot and kettle, spiced elderberry wine, and other comforts, to support them through their proposed vigil. And finally, in a sort of way, he took his leave of the body, with a long business-like stare, from the foot of the bed, with his short hands stuffed into his pockets. And so, to Mrs. Julaper's relief, this unseemly doctor, speaking thickly, departed.

And now, the Doctor being gone, and all things prepared for the 'wake' to be observed by withered Mrs. Bligh of the one eye, and yellow Mrs. Wale of the crooked back, the house grew gradually still. The thunder had by this time died into the solemn boom of distant battle, and the fury of the gale had subsided to the long sobbing wail that is charged with so eerie a melancholy. Within all was stirless, and the two old women, each a 'Mrs.' by courtesy, who had not much to thank Nature or the world for, sad and cynical, and in a sort outcasts told off by fortune to these sad and grizzly services, sat themselves down by the fire, each perhaps feeling unusually at home in the other's society; and in this soured and forlorn comfort, trimming their fire, quickening the song of the kettle to a boil, and waxing polite and chatty; each treating the other with that deprecatory and formal courtesy which invites a return in kind, and both growing strangely happy in this little world of their own, in the unusual and momentary sense of an importance and consideration which were delightful.

The old still-room of Mardykes Hall is an oblong room wainscoted. From the door you look its full length to the wide stone-shafted Tudor window at the other end. At your left is the pon-

derous mantelpiece, supported by two spiral stone pillars; and close to the door at the right was the bed in which the two crones had just stretched poor Philip Feltram, who lay as still as an uncoloured wax-work, with a heavy penny-piece on each eye, and a bandage under his jaw, making his mouth look stern. And the two old ladies over their tea by the fire conversed agreeably, compared their rheumatisms and other ailments wordily, and talked of old times, and early recollections, and of sick-beds they had attended, and corpses that 'you would not know, so pined and windered' were they; and others so fresh and canny, you'd say the dead had never looked so bonny in life.

Then they began to talk of people who grew tall in their coffins, of others who had been buried alive, and of others who walked after death. Stories as true as holy writ.

'Were you ever down by Hawarth, Mrs. Bligh—hard by Dalworth Moss?' asked crook-backed Mrs. Wale, holding her spoon suspended over her cup.

'Neea whaar sooa far south, Mrs. Wale, ma'am; but ma father was ofttimes down thar cuttin' peat.'

'Ah, then ye'll not a kenned farmer Dykes that lived by the Lin-tree Scaur. 'Tweer I that laid him out, poor aad fellow, and a dow man he was when aught went cross wi' him; and he cursed and sweared, twad gar ye dodder to hear him. They said he was a hard man wi' some folk; but he kep a good house, and liked to see plenty, and many a time when I was swaimous about my food, he'd clap t' meat on ma plate, and mak' me eat ma fill. Na, na—there was good as well as bad in farmer Dykes. It was a year after he deed, and Tom Ettles was walkin' down by the Birken Stoop one night, and not a soul nigh, when he sees a big ball, as high as his knee, whirlin' and spangin' away before him on the road. What it wer he could not think; but he never consayted there was a freet or a bo thereaway; so he kep near it, watchin' every spang and turn it took, till it ran into the gripe by the roadside. There was a gravel-pit just there, and Tom Ettles wished to take another gliff at it before he went on. But when he keeked into the pit, what should he see but a man attoppa a horse that could not get up or on; and says he, "I think ye be at a dead-lift there, gaffer." And wi' the word, up looks the man, and who sud it be but farmer Dykes himsel; and Tom Ettles saw him plain eneugh, and kenned the horse too for Black Jack, the farmer's aad beast, that broke his leg and was shot two years and more befor the farmer died. "Ay," says farmer Dykes, lookin' very bad; "forsett-and-backsett, ye'll tak' me oot, Tom Ettles, and clap ye doun behint me quick, or I'll claw ho'd o' thee." Tom felt his hair risin' stiff on his heed, and his tongue so fast to the roof o' his mouth he could scarce get oot a word; but says he, "If Black Jack can't do it o' noo, he'll ne'er

do't and carry double." "I ken my ain business best," says Dykes. "If ye gar me gie ye a look, 'twill gie ye the creepin's while ye live; so git ye doun, Tom;" and with that the dobby lifts its neaf; and Tom saw there was a red light round horse and man, like the glow of a peat fire. And says Tom, "In the name o' God, ye'll let me pass;" and with the word the gooast draws itsel' doun, all a-creaked, like a man wi' a sudden pain; and Tom Ettles took to his heels more deed than alive.'

They had approached their heads, and the story had sunk to that mysterious murmur that thrills the listener, when in the brief silence that followed they heard a low odd laugh near the door.

In that direction each lady looked aghast, and saw Feltram sitting straight up in the bed, with the white bandage in his hand, and as it seemed, for one foot was below the coverlet, near the floor, about to glide forth.

Mrs. Bligh, uttering a hideous shriek, clutched Mrs. Wale, and Mrs. Wale, with a scream as dreadful, gripped Mrs. Bligh; and quite forgetting their somewhat formal politeness, they reeled and tugged, wrestling towards the window, each struggling to place her companion between her and the 'dobby,' and both uniting in a direful peal of yells.

This was the uproar which had startled Sir Bale from his dream, and was now startling the servants from theirs.



J. A. Pasquier, del. Edmund Evans, sc.

THE FIGURE ON THE MOUNTAIN SIDE.

THE HAUNTED BARONET

BY J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS,' ETC.

Chapter XIII. The Mist on the Mountain.

Doctor Torvey was sent for early next morning, and came full of wonder, learning, and scepticism. Seeing is believing, however; and there was Philip Feltram living, and soon to be, in all bodily functions, just as usual.

'Upon my soul, Sir Bale, I couldn't have believed it, if I had not seen it with my eyes,' said the Doctor impressively, while sipping a glass of sherry in the 'breakfast-parlour,' as the great panelled and pictured room next the dining-room was called. 'I don't think there is any similar case on record—no pulse, no more than the poker; no respiration, by Jove, no more than the chimney-piece; as cold as a lead image in the garden there. Well, you'll say all that might possibly be fallacious; but what will you say to the cadaveric stiffness? Old Judy Wale can tell you; and my friend Marcella—Monocula would be nearer the mark—Mrs. Bligh, she knows all those common, and I may say up to this, infallible, signs of death, as well as I do. There is no mystery about them; they'll depose to the literality of the symptoms. You heard how they gave tongue. Upon my honour, I'll send the whole case up to my old chief, Sir Hervey Hansard, to London. You'll hear what a noise it will make among the profession. There never was—and it ain't too much to say there never *will* be—another case like it.'

During this lecture, and a great deal more, Sir Bale leaned back in his chair, with his legs extended, his heels on the ground, and his arms folded, looking sourly up in the fa a tall lady in white satin, in a ruff, and with a bird on her hand, who smiled down superciliously from her frame upon the Baronet. Sir Bale seemed a little bit high and dry with the Doctor.

'You physicians are unquestionably,' he said, 'a very learned profession.'

The Doctor bowed.

'But there's just one thing you know nothing about—'

'Eh? What's that?' inquired Doctor Torvey.

'Medicine,' answered Sir Bale. 'I was aware you never knew what was the matter with a sick man; but I didn't know, till now, that you couldn't tell when he was dead.'

'Ha, ha!—well—ha, ha!—*yes*—well, you see, you—ha, ha!—you certainly have me there. But it's a case without a parallel—it is, upon my honour. You'll find it will not only be talked about, but written about; and, whatever papers appear upon it, will come to me; and I'll take care, Sir Bale, you shall have an opportunity of reading them.'

'Of which I sha'n't avail myself,' answered Sir Bale. 'Take another glass of sherry, Doctor.'

The Doctor made his acknowledgments and filled his glass, and looked through the wine between him and the window.

'Ha, ha!—see there, your port, Sir Bale, gives a fellow such habits—looking for the beeswing, by Jove. It isn't easy, in one sense at least, to get your port out of a fellow's head when once he has tasted it.'

But if the honest Doctor meant a hint for a glass of that admirable bin, it fell pointless; and Sir Bale had no notion of making another libation of that precious liquor in honour of Doctor Torvey.

'And I take it for granted,' said Sir Bale, 'that Feltram will do very well; and, should anything go wrong, I can send for you—unless he should die again; and in that case I think I shall take my own opinion.'

So he and the Doctor parted.

Sir Bale, although he did not consult the Doctor on his own case, was not particularly well. 'That lonely place, those frightful mountains, and that damp black lake'—which features in the landscape he cursed all round—'are enough to give any man blue devils; and when a fellow's spirits go, he's all gone. That's why I'm dyspeptic—that and those d—d debts—and the post, with its flight of croaking and screaming letters from London. I wish there was no post here. I wish it was like Sir Amerald's time, when they shot the York mercer that came to dun him, and no one ever took him to task about it; and now they can pelt you at any distance they please through the post; and fellows lose their spirits and their appetite and any sort of miserable comfort that is possible in this odious abyss.'

Was there gout in Sir Bale's case, or 'vapours'? I know not what the faculty would have called it; but Sir Bale's mode of treatment was simply to work off the attack by long and laborious walking.

This evening his walk was upon the Fells of Golden Friars—long after the landscape below was in the eclipse of twilight, the broad bare sides and angles of these gigantic uplands still lighted by the misty western sun.

There is no such sense of solitude as that which we experience upon the silent and vast elevations of great mountains. Lifted high

above the level of human sounds and habitations, among the wild expanses and colossal features of Nature, we are thrilled in our loneliness with a strange fear and elation—an ascent above the reach of life's vexations or companionship, and the tremblings of a wild and undefined misgiving. The filmy disc of the moon had risen in the east, and was already faintly silvering the shadowy scenery below, while yet Sir Bale stood in the mellow light of the western sun, which still touched also the summits of the opposite peaks of Morvyn Fells.

Sir Bale Mardykes did not, as a stranger might, in prudence, hasten his descent from the heights at which he stood while yet a gleam of daylight remained to him. For he was, from his boyhood, familiar with those solitary regions; and, beside this, the thin circle of the moon, hung in the eastern sky, would brighten as the sunlight sank, and hang like a lamp above his steps.

There was in the bronzed and resolute face of the Baronet, lighted now in the parting beams of sunset, a resemblance to that of Charles the Second—not our 'merry' ideal, but the more energetic and saturnine face which the portraits have preserved to us.

He stood with folded arms on the side of the slope, admiring, in spite of his prejudice, the unusual effects of a view so strangely lighted—the sunset tints on the opposite peaks, lost in the misty twilight, now deepening lower down into a darker shade, through which the outlines of the stone gables and tower of Golden Friars and the light of fire or candle in their windows were dimly visible.

As he stood and looked, his more distant sunset went down, and sudden twilight was upon him, and he began to remember the beautiful Homeric picture of a landscape coming out, rock and headland, in the moonlight.

There had hung upon the higher summits, at his right, a heavy fold of white cloud, which on a sudden broke, and, like the smoke of artillery, came rolling down the slopes towards him. Its principal volume, however, unfolded itself in a mighty flood down the side of the mountain towards the lake; and that which spread towards and soon enveloped the ground on which he stood was by no means so dense a fog. A thick mist enough it was; but still, to a distance of twenty or thirty yards, he could discern the outline of a rock or scaur, but not beyond it.

There are few sensations more intimidating than that of being thus enveloped on a lonely mountain-side, which, like this one, here and there breaks into precipice.

There is another sensation, too, which affects the imagination. Overtaken thus on the solitary expanse, there comes a new chill and tremour as this treacherous medium surrounds us, through which unperceived those shapes which fancy conjures up might approach so near and bar our path.

From the risk of being reduced to an actual standstill he knew he was exempt. The point from which the wind blew, light as it was, assured him of that. Still the mist was thick enough seriously to embarrass him. It had overtaken him as he was looking down upon the lake; and he now looked to his left, to try whether in that direction it was too thick to permit a view of the nearest landmarks. Through this white film he saw a figure standing only about five-and-twenty steps away, looking down, as it seemed, in precisely the same direction as he, quite motionless, and standing like a shadow projected upon the smoky vapour. It was the figure of a slight tall man, with his arm extended, as if pointing to a remote object, which no mortal eye certainly could discern through the mist. Sir Bale gazed at this figure, doubtful whether he were in a waking dream, unable to conjecture whence it had come; and as he looked, it moved, and was almost instantly out of sight.

He descended the mountain cautiously. The mist was now thinner, and through the haze he was beginning to see objects more distinctly, and, without danger, to proceed at a quicker pace. He had still a long walk by the uplands towards Mardykes Hall, before he descended to the level of the lake.

The mist was still quite thick enough to circumscribe his view and to hide the general features of the landscape; and well was it, perhaps, for Sir Bale that his boyhood had familiarised him with the landmarks on the mountain-side.

He had made nearly four miles on his solitary homeward way, when, passing under a ledge of rock which bears the name of the Cat's Skaitch, he saw the same figure in the short cloak standing within some thirty or forty yards of him—the thin curtain of mist, through which the moonlight touched it, giving to it an airy and unsubstantial character.

Sir Bale came to a standstill. The man in the short cloak nodded and drew back, and was concealed by the angle of the rock.

Sir Bale was now irritated, as men are after a start, and shouting to the stranger to halt, he 'slapped' after him, as the northern phrase goes, at his best pace. But again he was gone, and nowhere could he see him, the mist favouring his evasion.

Looking down the fells that overhang Mardykes Hall, the mountain-side dips gradually into a glen, which, as it descends, becomes precipitous and wooded. A footpath through this ravine conducts the wayfarer to the level ground that borders the lake; and by this dark pass Sir Bale Mardykes strode, in comparatively clear air, along the rocky path dappled with moonlight.

As he emerged upon the lower ground he again encountered the same figure. It approached. It was Philip Feltram.

Chapter XIV.

A NEW PHILIP FELTRAM.

The Baronet had not seen Feltram since his strange escape from death. His last interview with him had been stern and threatening; Sir Bale dealing with appearances in the spirit of an incensed judge, Philip Feltram lamenting in the submission of a helpless despair.

Feltram was full in the moonlight now, standing erect, and smiling cynically on the Baronet.

There was that in the bearing and countenance of Feltram that disconcerted him more than the surprise of the sudden meeting.

He had determined to meet Feltram in a friendly way, whenever that not very comfortable interview became inevitable. But he was confused by the suddenness of Feltram's appearance; and the tone, cold and stern, in which he had last spoken to him came first, and he spoke in it after a brief silence.

'I fancied, Mr. Feltram, you were in your bed; I little expected to find you here. I think the Doctor gave very particular directions, and said that you were to remain perfectly quiet.'

'But I know more than the Doctor,' replied Feltram, still smiling unpleasantly.

'I think, sir, you would have been better in your bed,' said Sir Bale loftily.

'Come, come, come, come!' exclaimed Philip Feltram contemptuously.

'It seems to me, sir,' said Sir Bale, a good deal astonished, 'you rather forget yourself.'

'Easier to forget oneself than to forgive others, at times, Sir Bale,' replied Philip Feltram in his unparalleled mood.

'That's the way fools knock themselves up,' continued Sir Bale. 'You've been walking ever so far—away to the Fells of Golden Friars. It was you whom I saw there. What d—d folly! What brought you there?'

'To observe you,' he replied.

'And have you walked the whole way there and back again? How did you get there?'

'Pooh! how did I come—how did you come—how did the fog come? From the lake, I suppose. We all come up, and then down.' So spoke Philip Feltram, with serene insolence.

'You are pleased to talk nonsense,' said Sir Bale.

'Because I like it—with a *meaning*.'

Sir Bale looked at him, not knowing whether to believe his eyes and ears. He did not know what to make of him.

'I had intended speaking to you in a conciliatory way; you seem to wish to make that impossible'—Philip Feltram's face wore its re-

pulsive smile;—'and in fact I don't know what to make of you, unless you are ill; and ill you well may be. You can't have walked much less than twelve miles.'

'Wonderful effort for me!' said Feltram with the same sneer.

'Rather surprising for a man so nearly drowned,' answered Sir Bale Mardykes.

'A dip: you don't like the lake, sir; but I do. And so it is: as Antæus touched the earth, so I the water, and rise refreshed.'

'I think you'd better get in and refresh there. I meant to tell you that all the unpleasantness about that bank-note is over.'

'Is it?'

'Yes. It has been recovered by Mr. Creswell, who came here last night. I've got it, and you're not to blame,' said Sir Bale.

'But some one *is* to blame,' observed Mr. Feltram, smiling still.

'Well, *you* are not, and that ends it,' said the Baronet peremptorily.

'Ends it? Really, how good! how very good!'

Sir Bale looked at him, for there was something ambiguous and even derisive in the tone of Feltram's voice.

But before he could quite make up his mind, Feltram spoke again.

'Everything is settled about you and me?'

'There is nothing to prevent your staying at Mardykes now,' said Sir Bale graciously.

'I shall be with you for two years, and then I go on my travels,' answered Feltram, with a saturnine and somewhat wild look around him.

'Is he going mad?' thought the Baronet.

'But before I go, I'm to put you in a way of paying off your mortgages. That is my business here.'

Sir Bale looked at him sharply. But now there was not the unpleasant smile, but the darkened look of a man in secret pain.

'You shall know it by and by.'

And without more ceremony, and with a darkening face, Philip Feltram made his way under the boughs of the thick oaks that grew there, leaving on Sir Bale's mind an impression that he had been watching some one at a distance, and had gone in consequence of a signal.

In a few seconds he followed in the same direction, halloaing after Feltram; for he did not like the idea of his wandering about the country by moonlight, or possibly losing his life among the precipices, and bringing a new discredit upon his house. But no answer came; nor could he in that thick copse gain sight of him again.

When Sir Bale reached Mardykes Hall he summoned Mrs. Julaper, and had a long talk with her. But she could not say that there appeared anything amiss with Philip Feltram; only he seemed

more reserved, and as if he was brooding over something he did not intend to tell.

'But, you know, Sir Bale, what happened might well make a thoughtful man of him. If he's ever to think of Death, it should be after looking him so hard in the face; and I'm not ashamed to say, I'm glad to see he has grace to take the lesson, and I hope his experiences may be sanctified to him, poor fellow! Amen.'

'Very good song, and very well sung,' said Sir Bale; 'but it doesn't seem to me that he has been improved, Mrs. Julaper. He seems, on the contrary, in a queer temper and anything but a heavenly frame of mind; and I thought I'd ask you, because if he is ill—I mean feverish—it might account for his eccentricities, as well as make it necessary to send after him, and bring him home, and put him to bed. But I suppose it is as you say,—his adventure has upset him a little, and he'll sober in a day or two, and return to his old ways.'

But this did not happen. A change, more comprehensive than at first appeared, had taken place, and a singular alteration was gradually established.

He grew thin, his eyes hollow, his face gradually forbidding.

His ways and temper were changed: he was a new man with Sir Bale; and the Baronet after a time, people said, began to grow afraid of him. And certainly Feltram had acquired an extraordinary influence over the Baronet, who a little while ago had regarded and treated him with so much contempt.

Chapter XV.

THE PURSE OF GOLD.

The Baronet was very slightly known in his county. He had led a reserved and inhospitable life. He was pressed upon by heavy debts; and being a proud man, held aloof from society and its doings. He wished people to understand that he was nursing his estate; but somehow the estate did not thrive at nurse. In the country other people's business is admirably well known; and the lord of Mardykes was conscious, perhaps, that his neighbours knew as well as he did that the utmost he could do was to pay the interest charged upon it, and to live in a frugal way enough.

The lake measures some four or five miles across, from the little jetty under the walls of Mardykes Hall to Cloostedd.

Philip Feltram, changed and morose, loved a solitary row upon the lake; and sometimes, with no one to aid him in its management, would take the little sail-boat and pass the whole day upon those lonely waters.

Frequently he crossed to Cloostedd; and mooring the boat under

the solemn trees that stand reflected in that dark mirror, he would disembark and wander among the lonely woodlands, as people thought, cherishing in those ancestral scenes the memory of ineffaceable injuries, and the wrath and revenge that seemed of late to darken his countenance, and to hold him always in a moody silence.

One autumnal evening Sir Bale Mardykes was sourly ruminating after his solitary meal. A very red sun was pouring its last beams through the valley at the western extremity of the lake, across its elsewhere sombre waters, and touching with a sudden and blood-red tint the sail of the skiff in which Feltram was returning from his lonely cruise.

'Here comes my domestic water-fiend,' sneered Sir Bale, as he lay back in his cumbrous arm-chair. 'Cheerful place, pleasant people, delicious fate! The place alone has been enough to set that fool out of his little senses, d—n him!'

Sir Bale averted his eyes, and another subject not pleasanter entered his mind. He was thinking of the races that were coming off next week at Heckleston Downs, and what sums of money might be made there, and how hard it was that he should be excluded by fortune from that brilliant lottery.

'Ah, Mrs. Julaper, is that you?'

Mrs. Julaper, who was still at the door, curtsied, and said, 'I came, Sir Bale, to see whether you'd please to like a jug of mulled claret, sir.'

'Not I, my dear. I'll take a mug of beer and my pipe; that homely solace better befits a ruined gentleman.'

'H'm, sir; you're not that, Sir Bale; you're no worse than half the lords and great men that are going. I would not hear another say that of you, sir.'

'That's very kind of you, Mrs. Julaper; but you won't call *me* out for backbiting myself, especially as it is true, d—d true, Mrs. Julaper! Look ye; there never was a Mardykes here before but he could lay his hundred or his thousand pounds on the winner of the Heckleston Cup; and what could I bet? Little more than that mug of beer I spoke of. It was my great-grandfather who opened the course on the Downs of Heckleston, and now *I* can't show there! Well, what must I do? Grin and bear it, that's all. If you please, Mrs. Julaper, I will have that jug of claret you offered. I want spice and hot wine to keep me alive; but I'll smoke my pipe first, and in an hour's time it will do.'

When Mrs. Julaper was gone, he lighted his pipe, and drew near the window, through which he looked upon the now fading sky and the twilight landscape.

He smoked his pipe out, and by that time it had grown nearly dark. He was still looking out upon the faint outlines of the view, and thinking angrily what a little bit of luck at the races would do

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great improvement making *her* fee you,' observed Sir Bale, with an approach to his old manner.

'He put that in my hand, with a message,' said Feltram.

'He? O, then it was a male fortune-teller!'

'Gipsies go in gangs, men and women. *He* might lend, though *she* told fortunes,' said Feltram.

'It's the first time I ever heard of gipsies lending money;' and he eyed the purse with a whimsical smile.

With his lean fingers still holding it, Feltram sat down at the table. His face darkened as if in cunning thought, and his chin sank upon his breast as he leaned back.

'I think,' continued Sir Bale, 'ever since they were spoiled, the Egyptians have been a little shy of lending, and leave that branch of business to the Hebrews.'

'What would you give to know, now, the winner at Heckleston races?' said Feltram suddenly, raising his eyes.

'Yes; that would be worth something,' answered Sir Bale, looking at him with more interest than the incredulity he affected would quite warrant.

'And this money I have power to lend you, to make your game.'

'Do you mean that really?' said Sir Bale, with a new energy in tone, manner, and features.

'That's heavy; there are some guineas there,' said Feltram with a dark smile, raising the purse in his hand a little, and letting it drop upon the table with a clang.

'There is *something* there, at all events,' said Sir Bale.

Feltram took the purse by the bottom, and poured out on the table a handsome pile of guineas.

'And do you mean to say, you got all that from a gipsy in Cloostedd Wood?'

'A friend, who is—*myself*,' answered Philip Feltram.

'Yourself! Then it is yours—*you* lend it?' said the Baronet, amazed; for there was no getting over the heap of guineas, and the wonder was pretty equal whence they had come.

'Myself, and not myself,' said Feltram oracularly; 'as like as voice and echo, man and shadow.'

Had Feltram in some of his solitary wanderings and potterings lighted upon hidden treasure? There was a story of two Feltrams of Cloostedd, brothers, who had joined the king's army and fought at Marston Moor, having buried in Cloostedd Wood a great deal of gold and plate and jewels. They had, it was said, intrusted one tried servant with the secret; and that servant remained at home. But by a perverse fatality the three witnesses had perished within a month: the two brothers at Marston Moor; and the confidant, of fever, at Cloostedd. From that day forth treasure-seekers had from time to time explored the woods of Cloostedd; and many a tree of

mark was dug beside, and the earth beneath many a stone and scar and other landmark in that solitary forest was opened by night, until hope gradually died out, and the tradition had long ceased to prompt to action, and had become a story and nothing more.

The image of the nursery-tale had now recurred to Sir Bale after so long a reach of years; and the only imaginable way, in his mind, of accounting for penniless Philip Feltram having all that gold in his possession was that, in some of his lonely wanderings, chance had led him to the undiscovered hoard of the two Feltrams who had died in the great civil wars.

'Perhaps those gipsies you speak of found the money where you found them; and in that case, as Cloostedd Forest, and all that is in it, is my property, their sending it to me is more like my servant's handing me my hat and stick when I'm going out, than making me a present.'

'You will not be wise to rely upon the law, Sir Bale, and to refuse the help that comes unasked. But if you like your mortgages as they are, keep them; and if you like my terms as they are, take them; and when you have made up your mind, let me know.'

Philip Feltram dropped the heavy purse into his capacious coat-pocket, and walked, muttering, out of the room.

Chapter XVI.

THE MESSAGE FROM CLOOSTEDD.

'Come back, Feltram; come back, Philip!' cried Sir Bale hastily. 'Let us talk, can't we? Come and talk this odd business over a little; you must have mistaken what I meant; I should like to hear all about it.'

'All is not much, sir,' said Philip Feltram, reëntering the room, whose door he had half closed after him. 'In the forest of Cloostedd I met to-day some people, one of whom can foretell events, and told me the names of the winners of the first three races at Heckleston, and gave me this purse, with leave to lend you so much money as you care to stake upon the races. I take no security; you sha'n't be troubled; and you'll never see the lender, unless you seek him out.'

'Well, those are not bad terms,' said Sir Bale, smiling wistfully at the purse, which Feltram had again placed upon the table.

'No, not bad,' repeated Feltram, in the harsh low tone in which he now habitually spoke.

'You'll tell me what the prophet said about the winners; I should like to hear the names.'

'The names I shall tell you, if you walk out with me,' said Feltram.

'Why not here?' asked Sir Bale.

'My memory does not serve me here so well. Some people, in

some places, though they be silent, obstruct thought. Come, let us speak,' said Philip Feltram, leading the way.

Sir Bale, with a shrug, followed him.

By this time it was dark. Feltram was walking slowly towards the margin of the lake; and Sir Bale, more curious as the delay increased, followed him, and smiled faintly as he looked after his tall gaunt figure, as if, even in the dark, expressing a ridicule which he did not honestly feel, and the expression of which, even if there had been light, there was no one near enough to see.

When he reached the edge of the lake, Feltram stooped, and Sir Bale thought that his attitude was that of one who whispers to and caresses a reclining person. What he fancied was a dark figure lying horizontally in the shallow water, near the edge, turned out to be, as he drew near, no more than a shadow on the elsewhere lighter water; and with his change of position it had shifted and was gone, and Philip Feltram was but dabbling his hand this way and that in the water, and muttering faintly to himself. He rose as the Baronet drew near, and standing upright, said,

'I like to listen to the ripple of the water among the grass and pebbles; the tongue and lips of the lake are lapping and whispering all along. It is the merest poetry; but you are so romantic, you excuse me.'

There was an angry curve in Feltram's eyebrows, and a cynical smile, and something in the tone which to the satirical Baronet was almost insulting. But even had he been less curious, I don't think he would have betrayed his mortification; for an odd and unavowed influence which he hated was gradually establishing in Feltram an ascendency which sometimes vexed and sometimes cowed him.

'You are not to tell,' said Feltram, drawing near him in the dusk. 'The secret is yours when you promise.'

'Of course I promise,' said Sir Bale. 'If I believed it, you don't think I could be such an ass as to tell it; and if I didn't believe it, I'd hardly take the trouble.'

Feltram stooped, and dipping the hollow of his hand in the water, he raised it full, and said he, 'Hold out your hand—the hollow of your hand—like this. I divide the water for a sign—share to me and share to you.' And he turned his hand, so as to pour half the water into the hollow palm of Sir Bale, who was smiling, with some uneasiness mixed in his mockery.

'Now, you promise to keep all secrets respecting the teller and the finder, be that who it may?'

'Yes, I promise,' said Sir Bale.

'Now do as I do,' said Feltram. And he shed the water on the ground, and with his wet fingers touched his forehead and his breast; and then he joined his hand with Sir Bale's, and said, 'Now you are my safe man.'

Sir Bale laughed. 'That's the game they call "grand mufti,"' said he.

'Exactly; and means nothing,' said Feltram, 'except that some day it will serve you to remember by. And now the names. Don't speak; listen—you may break the thought else. The winner of the first is *Beeswing;* of the second, *Falcon;* and of the third, *Lightning*.'

He had stood for some seconds in silence before he spoke; his eyes were closed; he seemed to bring up thought and speech with difficulty, and spoke faintly and drowsily, both his hands a little raised, and the fingers extended, with the groping air of a man who moves in the dark. In this odd way, slowly, faintly, with many a sigh and scarcely audible groan, he gradually delivered his message and was silent. He stood, it seemed, scarcely half awake, muttering indistinctly and sighing to himself. You would have said that he was exhausted and suffering, like a man at his last hour resigning himself to death.

At length he opened his eyes, looked round a little wildly and languidly, and with another great sigh sat down on a large rock that lies by the margin of the lake, and sighed heavily again and again. You might have fancied that he was a second time recovering from drowning.

Then he got up, and looked drowsily round again, and sighed like a man worn out with fatigue, and was silent.

Sir Bale did not care to speak until he seemed a little more likely to obtain an answer. When that time came, he said, 'I wish, for the sake of my believing, that your list was a little less incredible. Not one of the horses you name is the least likely; not one of them has a chance.'

'So much the better for you; you'll get what odds you please. You had better seize your luck; on Tuesday Beeswing runs,' said Feltram. 'When you want money for the purpose, I'm your banker—here is your bank.'

He touched his breast, where he had placed the purse, and then he turned and walked swiftly away.

Sir Bale looked after him till he disappeared in the dark. He fluctuated among many surmises about Feltram. Was he insane, or was he practising an imposture? or was he fool enough to believe the predictions of some real gipsies? and had he borrowed this money, which in Sir Bale's eyes seemed the greatest miracle in the matter, from those thriving shepherd mountaineers, the old Trebecks, who, he believed, were attached to him? Feltram had, he thought, borrowed it as if for himself; and having, as Sir Bale in his egotism supposed, 'a sneaking regard' for him, had meant the loan for his patron, and conceived the idea of his using his revelations for the purpose of making his fortune. So, seeing no risk, and the tempta-

tion being strong, Sir Bale resolved to avail himself of the purse, and use his own judgment as to what horse to back.

About eleven o'clock Feltram, unannounced, walked, with his hat still on, into Sir Bale's library, and sat down at the opposite side of his table, looking darkly into the Baronet's face for a time.

'Shall you want the purse?' he asked at last.

'Certainly; I always want a purse,' said Sir Bale energetically.

'The condition is, that you shall back each of the three horses I have named. But you may back them for much or little, as you like, only the sum must not be less than five pounds in each hundred which this purse contains. That is the condition, and if you violate it, you will make some powerful people very angry, and you will feel it. Do you agree?'

'Of course; five pounds in the hundred—certainly; and how many hundreds are there?'

'Three.'

'Well, a fellow with luck may win something with three hundred pounds, but it ain't very much.'

'Quite enough, if you use it aright.'

'Three hundred pounds,' repeated the Baronet, as he emptied the purse, which Feltram had just placed in his hand, upon the table; and contemplating them with grave interest, he began telling them off in little heaps of five-and-twenty each. He might have thanked Feltram, but he was thinking more of the guineas than of the grizzly donor.

'Ay,' said he, after a second counting, 'I think there *are* exactly three hundred. Well, so you say I must apply three times five—fifteen of these. It is an awful pity backing those queer horses you have named; but if I must make the sacrifice, I must, I suppose?' he added, with a hesitating inquiry in the tone.

'If you don't, you'll rue it,' said Feltram coldly, and so left the room.

'Penny in pocket's a merry companion,' says the old English proverb, and Sir Bale felt in better spirits and temper than he had for many a day as he replaced the guineas in the purse.

It was long since he had visited either the race-course or any other place of amusement. Now he might face his kind without fear that his pride should be mortified, and dabble in the fascinating agitations of the turf once more.

'Who knows how this little venture may turn out?' he thought. 'It's time the luck should turn. My last summer in Germany, my last winter in Paris—d—n me, I'm owed something. It's time I should win a bit.'

Sir Bale had suffered the indolence of a solitary and discontented life imperceptibly to steal upon him. It would not do to appear

for the first time on Heckleston Lea with any of those signs of negligence which, in his case, might easily be taken for poverty. All his appointments, therefore, were carefully looked after; and on the Monday following, he, followed by his groom, rode away for the Saracen's Head at Heckleston, where he was to put up, for the races that were to begin on the day following, and presented as handsome an appearance as a peer in those days need have cared to show.

Chapter XVII.

ON THE COURSE—BEESWING, FALCON, AND LIGHTNING.

As he rode towards Golden Friars, through which his route lay, in the early morning light, in which the mists of night were clearing, he looked back towards Mardykes with a hope of speedy deliverance from that hated imprisonment, and of a return to the continental life in which he took delight. He saw the summits and angles of the old building touched with the cheerful beams, and the grand old trees, and at the opposite side the fells dark, with their backs towards the east; and down the side of the wooded and precipitous clough of Feltram, the light, with a pleasant contrast against the beetling purple of the fells, was breaking in the faint distance. On the lake he saw the white speck that indicated the sail of Philip Feltram's boat, now midway between Mardykes and the wooded shores of Cloostedd.

'Going on the same errand,' thought Sir Bale, 'I should not wonder. I wish him the same luck. Yes, he's going to Cloostedd Forest. I hope he may meet his gipsies there—the Trebecks, or whoever they are.'

And as a momentary sense of degradation in being thus beholden to such people smote him, 'Well,' thought he, 'who knows? Many a fellow will make a handsome sum of a poorer purse than this at Heckleston. It will be a light matter paying them then.'

Through Golden Friars he rode. Some of the spectators who did not like him, wondered audibly at the gallant show, hoped it was paid for, and conjectured that he had ridden out in search of a wife. On the whole, however, the appearance of their Baronet in a smarter style than usual was popular, and accepted as a change to the advantage of the town.

Next morning he was on the race-course of Heckleston, renewing old acquaintance and making himself as agreeable as he could—an object, among some people, of curiosity and even interest. Leaving the carriage-sides, the hoods and bonnets, Sir Bale was soon among the betting men, deep in more serious business.

How did he make his book? He did not break his word. He backed Beeswing, Falcon, and Lightning. But it must be owned not for a shilling more than the five guineas each, to which he stood

pledged. The odds were forty-five to one against Beeswing, sixty to one against Lightning, and fifty to one against Falcon.

'A pretty lot to choose!' exclaimed Sir Bale, with vexation. 'As if I had money so often, that I should throw it away!'

The Baronet was testy in thinking over all this, and looked on Feltram's message as an impertinence and the money as his own.

Let us now see how Sir Bale Mardyke's pocket fared.

Sulkily enough at the close of the week he turned his back on Heckleston race-course, and took the road to Golden Friars.

He was in a rage with his luck, and by no means satisfied with himself; and yet he had won something. The result of the racing had been curious. In the three principal races the favourites had been beaten: one by an accident, another on a technical point, and the third by fair running. And what horses had won? The names were precisely those which the 'fortune-teller' had predicted.

Well, then, how was Sir Bale in pocket as he rode up to his ancestral house of Mardykes, where a few thousand pounds would have been very welcome? He had won exactly 775 guineas; and had he staked a hundred instead of five on each of the names communicated by Feltram, he would have won 15,500 guineas.

He dismounted before his hall-door, therefore, with the discontent of a man who had lost nearly 15,000 pounds. Feltram was upon the steps, and laughed dryly.

'What do you laugh at?' asked Sir Bale tartly.

'You've won, haven't you?'

'Yes, I've won; I've won a trifle.'

'On the horses I named?'

'Well, yes; it so turned out, by the merest accident.'

Feltram laughed again dryly, and turned away.

Sir Bale entered Mardykes Hall, and was surly. He was in a much worse mood than before he had ridden to Heckleston. But after a week or so ruminating upon the occurrence, he wondered that Feltram spoke no more of it. It was undoubtedly wonderful. There had been no hint of repayment yet, and he had made some hundreds by the loan; and, contrary to all likelihood, the three horses named by the unknown soothsayer had won. Who was this gipsy? It would be worth bringing the soothsayer to Mardykes, and giving his people a camp on the warren, and all the poultry they could catch, and a pig or a sheep every now and then. Why, that seer was worth the philosopher's stone, and could make Sir Bale's fortune in a season. Some one else would be sure to pick him up if *he* did not.

So, tired of waiting for Feltram to begin, he opened the subject one day himself. He had not seen him for two or three days; and in the wood of Mardykes he saw his lank figure standing among the thick trees, upon a little knoll, leaning on a staff which he sometimes carried with him in his excursions up the mountains.

'Feltram!' shouted Sir Bale.

Feltram turned and beckoned. Sir Bale Mardykes muttered, but obeyed the signal.

'I brought you here, because you can from this point with unusual clearness to-day see the opening of the Clough of Feltram at the other side, and the clump of trees, where you will find the way to reach the person about whom you are always thinking.'

'Who said I am always thinking about him?' said the Baronet angrily; for he felt like a man detected in a weakness, and resented it.

'*I* say it, because I *know* it; and *you* know it also. See that clump of trees standing solitary in the hollow? Among them, to the left, grows an ancient oak. Cut in its bark are two enormous letters—F; so large and bold, that the rugged furrows of the oak bark fail to obscure them, although they are ancient and spread by time. Standing against the trunk of this great tree, with your back to these letters, you are looking up the Glen or Clough of Feltram, that opens northward, where stands Cloostedd Forest spreading far and thick. Now, how do you find our fortune-teller?'

'That is exactly what I wish to know,' answered Sir Bale; 'because, although I can't, of course, believe that he's a witch, yet he has either made the most marvellous fluke I've heard of, or else he has got extraordinary sources of information; or perhaps he acts partly on chance, partly on facts. Be it which you please, I say he's a marvellous fellow; and I should like to see him, and have a talk with him; and perhaps he could arrange with me. I should be very glad to make an arrangement with him to give me the benefit of his advice about any matter of the same kind again.'

'I think he's willing to see you; but he's a fellow with a queer fancy and a pig-head. He'll not come here; you must go to him; and approach him his own way too, or you may fail to find him. On these terms he invites you.'

Sir Bale laughed.

'He knows his value, and means to make his own terms.'

'Well, there's nothing unfair in that; and I don't see that I should dispute it. How is one to find him?'

'Stand, as I told you, with your back to those letters cut in the oak. Right before you lies an old Druidic altar-stone. Cast your eye over its surface, and on some part of it you are sure to see a black stain about the size of a man's hand. Standing, as I suppose you, against the oak, that stain, which changes its place from day to day, will give you the line you must follow through the forest in order to light upon him. Take carefully from it such trees or objects as will guide you; and when the forest thickens, do the best you can to keep to the same line. You are sure to find him.'

'You'll come, Feltram. I should lose myself in that wilderness,

and probably fail to discover him,' said Sir Bale; 'and I really wish to see him.'

'When two people wish to meet, it is hard if they don't. I can go with you a bit of the way; I can walk a little through the forest by your side, until I see the small flower that grows peeping here and there, that always springs where those people walk; and when I begin to see that sign, I must leave you. And, first, I'll take you across the lake.'

'By Jove, you'll do no such thing!' said Sir Bale hastily.

'But that is the way he chooses to be approached,' said Philip Feltram.

'I have a sort of feeling about that lake; it's the one childish spot that is left in my imagination. The nursery is to blame for it—old stories and warnings; and I can't think of that. I should feel that I had invoked an evil omen if I did. I know it is all nonsense; but we are queer creatures, Feltram. I must only ride there.'

'Why, it is five-and-twenty miles round the lake to that; and after all were done, he would not see you. He knows what he's worth, and he'll have his own way,' answered Feltram. 'The sun will soon set. See that withered spray, near Snakes Island, that looks like fingers rising from the water? When its points grow tipped with red, the sun has but three minutes more to live.'

'That is a wonder which I can't see; it is too far away.'

'Yes; the lake has many signs; but it needs sight to see them,' said Feltram.

'So it does,' said the Baronet; 'more than most men have got. I'll ride round, I say; and I make my visit, for this time, my own way.'

'You'll not find him, then; and he wants his money. It would be a pity to vex him.'

'It was to you he lent the money,' said Sir Bale.

'Yes.'

'Well, you are the proper person to find him out and pay him,' urged Sir Bale.

'Perhaps so; but he invites you; and if you don't go, he may be offended, and you may hear no more from him.'

'We'll try. When can you go? There are races to come off next week, for once and away, at Langton. I should not mind trying my luck there. What do you say?'

'I know nothing about it. What can I say?'

'You can go there and pay him, and ask the same question—what horses, I mean, are to win. All the county are to be there; and plenty of money will change hands.'

'I'll try,' said Feltram.

'When will you go?'

'To-morrow,' he answered.

'I have an odd idea, Feltram, that you are really going to pay off those cursed mortgages.'

He laid his hand with at least a gesture of kindness on the thin arm of Feltram, who coldly answered,

'So have I;' and walked down the side of the little knoll and away, without another word or look.

Chapter XVIII.

ON THE LAKE, AT LAST.

Next day Philip Feltram crossed the lake; and Sir Bale, seeing the boat on the water, guessed its destination, and watched its progress with no little interest, until he saw it moored and its sail drop at the rude pier that affords a landing at the Clough of Feltram. He was now satisfied that Philip had actually gone to seek out the 'cunning man,' and gather hints for the next race.

When that evening Feltram returned, and, later still, entered Sir Bale's library, the master of Mardykes was gladder to see him and more interested about his news than he would have cared to confess.

Philip Feltram did not affect unconsciousness of that anxiety, but, with great directness, proceeded to satisfy it.

'I was in Cloostedd Forest to-day, nearly all day—and found the old gentleman in a wax. He did not ask me to drink, nor show me any kindness. He was huffed because you would not take the trouble to cross the lake to speak to him yourself. He took the money you sent him, and counted it over, and dropped it into his pocket; and he called you hard names enough and to spare; but I brought him round, and at last he did talk.'

'And what did he say?'

'He said that the estate of Mardykes would belong to a Feltram.'

'He might have said something more likely,' said Sir Bale sourly. 'Did he say anything more?'

'Yes. He said the winner at Langton Lea would be Silver Bell.'

'Any other name?'

'No.'

'Silver Bell? Well, that's not so odd as the last. Silver Bell stands high in the list. He has a good many backers—long odds in his favour against most of the field. I should not mind backing Silver Bell.'

The fact is, that he had no idea of backing any other horse from the moment he heard the soothsayer's prediction. He made up his mind to no half measures this time. He would go in to win something handsome.

He was in great force and full of confidence on the race-course. He had no fears for the result. He bet heavily. There was a good margin still untouched of the Mardykes estate; and Sir Bale was a good old name in the county. He found a ready market for his offers, and had soon staked—such is the growing frenzy of that excitement—about twenty thousand pounds on his favourite, and stood to win seven.

He did not win, however. He lost his twenty thousand pounds.

And now the Mardykes estate was in imminent danger. Sir Bale returned, having distributed I O Us and promissory notes in all directions about him—quite at his wit's end.

Feltram was standing—as on the occasion of his former happier return—on the steps of Mardykes Hall, in the evening sun, throwing eastward a long shadow that was lost in the lake. He received him, as before, with a laugh.

Sir Bale was too much broken to resent this laugh as furiously as he might, had he been a degree less desperate.

He looked at Feltram savagely, and dismounted.

'Last time you would not trust him, and this time he would not trust you. He's huffed, and played you false.'

'It was not he. I should have backed that d—d horse in any case,' said Sir Bale, grinding his teeth. 'What a witch you have discovered! One thing is true, perhaps. If there was a Feltram rich enough, he might have the estate now; but there ain't. They are all beggars. So much for your conjurer.'

'He may make amends to you, if you make amends to him.'

'He! Why, what can that wretched impostor do? D—n me, I'm past helping now.'

'Don't you talk so,' said Feltram. 'Be civil. You must please the old gentleman. He'll make it up. He's placable when it suits him. Why not go to him his own way? I hear you are nearly ruined. You must go and make it up.'

'Make it up! With whom? With a fellow who can't make even a guess at what's coming? Why should I trouble my head about him more?'

'No man, young or old, likes to be frumped. Why did you cross his fancy? He won't see you unless you go to him as he chooses.'

'If he waits for that, he may wait till doomsday. I don't choose to go on that water—and cross it I won't,' said Sir Bale.

But when his distracting reminders began to pour in upon him, and the idea of dismembering what remained of his property came home to him, his resolution faltered.

'I say, Feltram, what difference can it possibly make to him if I choose to ride round to Cloostedd Forest instead of crossing the lake in a boat?'

Feltram smiled darkly, and answered,

'I can't tell. Can you?'

'Of course I can't—I say I can't; besides, what audacity of a fellow like that presuming to prescribe to me! Utterly ludicrous! And he can't predict—do you really think or believe, Feltram, that he can?'

'I know he can. I know he misled you on purpose. He likes to punish those who don't respect his will; and there is a reason in it, often quite clear—not ill-natured. Now you see he compels you to seek him out, and when you do, I think he'll help you through your trouble. He said he would.'

'Then you have seen him since?'

'Yesterday. He has put a pressure on you; but he means to help you.'

'If he means to help me, let him remember I want a banker more than a seer. Let him give me a lift, as he did before. He must lend me money.'

'He'll not stick at that. When he takes up a man, he carries him through.'

'The races of Byermere—I might retrieve at them. But they don't come off for a month nearly; and what is a man like me to do in the mean time?'

'Every man should know his own business best. I'm not like you,' said Feltram grimly.

Now Sir Bale's trouble increased, for some people were pressing. Something like panic supervened; for it happened that land was bringing just then a bad price, and more must be sold in consequence.

'All I can tell them is, I am selling land. It can't be done in an hour. I'm selling enough to pay them all twice over. Gentlemen used to be able to wait till a man sold his acres for payment. D—n them! do they want my body, that they can't let me alone for five minutes?'

The end of it was, that before a week Sir Bale told Feltram that he would go by boat, since that fellow insisted on it; and he did not very much care if he were drowned.

It was a beautiful autumnal day. Everything was bright in that mellowed sun, and the deep blue of the lake was tremulous with golden ripples; and crag and peak and scattered wood, faint in the distance, came out with a filmy distinctness on the fells in that pleasant light.

Sir Bale had been ill, and sent down the night before for Doctor Torvey. He was away with a patient. Now, in the morning, he had arrived inopportunely. He met Sir Bale as he issued from the house, and had a word with him in the court, for he would not turn back.

'Well,' said the Doctor, after his brief inspection, 'you ought to be in your bed; that's all I can say. You are perfectly mad to think of knocking about like this. Your pulse is at a hundred and ten; and, if you go across the lake and walk about Cloostedd, you'll be raving before you come back.'

Sir Bale told him, apologetically, as if his life were more to his doctor than to himself, that he would take care not to fatigue himself, and that the air would do him good, and that in any case he could not avoid going; and so they parted.

Sir Bale took his seat beside Feltram in the boat, the sail was spread, and, bending to the light breeze that blew from Golden Friars, she glided from the jetty under Mardykes Hall, and the eventful voyage had begun.



J. A. Pasquier, del. Edmund Evans, sc.

THE MYSTERY OF SIR BALE'S ROOM.

THE HAUNTED BARONET

BY J. S. LE FANU,
AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS,' ETC.

CHAPTER XIX. MYSTAGOGUS.

THE sail was loosed, the boat touched the stone step, and Feltram sprang out and made her fast to the old iron ring. The Baronet followed. So! he had ventured upon that water without being drowned. He looked round him as if in a dream. He had not been there since his boyhood. There were no regrets, no sentiment, no remorse; only an odd return of the associations and fresh feelings of boyhood, and a long reach of time suddenly annihilated.

The little hollow in which he stood; the three hawthorn trees at his right; every crease and undulation of the sward, every angle and crack in the lichen-covered rock at his feet, recurred with a sharp and instantaneous recognition to his memory.

'Many a time your brother and I fished for hours together from that bank there, just where the bramble grows. That bramble has not grown an inch ever since, not a leaf altered; we used to pick blackberries off it, with our rods stuck in the bank—it was later in the year than now—till we stript it quite bare after a day or two. The steward used to come over—they were marking timber for cutting—and we used to stay here while they rambled through the wood there, with an axe marking the trees that were to come down. I wonder whether the big old boat is still anywhere. I suppose she was broken up, or left to rot; I have not seen her since we came home. It was in the wood that lies at the right—the other wood is called the forest; they say in old times it was eight miles long, northward up the shore of the lake, and full of deer; with a forester, and a reeve, and a verderer, and all that. Your brother was older than you; he went to India, or the Colonies; is he living still?'

'I care not.'

'That's good-natured, at all events; but do you know?'

'Not I; and what matter? If he's living, I warrant he has his share of the curse, the sweat of his brow and his bitter crust; and if he is dead, he's dust or worse, he's rotten, and smells accordingly.'

Sir Bale looked at him; for this was the brother over whom, only a year or two ago, Philip used to cry tears of pathetic longing. Feltram looked darkly in his face, and sneered with a cold laugh.

'I suppose you mean to jest?' said Sir Bale.

'Not I; it is the truth. It is what you'd say, if you were honest. If he's alive, let him keep where he is; and if he's dead, I'll have none of him, body or soul. Do you hear that sound?'

'Like the wind moaning in the forest?' said Sir Bale.

'Yes.'

'But I feel no wind. There's hardly a leaf stirring.'

'I think so,' said Feltram. 'Come along.'

And he began striding up the gentle slope of the glen, with many a rock peeping through its sward, and tufted ferns and furze, giving a wild and neglected character to the scene; the background of which, where the glen loses itself in a distant turn, is formed by its craggy and wooded side.

Up they marched, side by side, in silence, towards that irregular clump of trees, to which Feltram had pointed from the Mardykes side.

As they approached, it showed more scattered, and two or three of the trees were of grander dimensions than in the distance they had appeared; and as they walked, the broad valley of Cloostedd Forest opened grandly on their left, studding the sides of the valley with solitary trees or groups, which thickened as it descended to the broad level, in parts nearly three miles wide, on which stands the noble forest of Cloostedd, now majestically reposing in the stirless air, gilded and flushed with the melancholy tints of autumn.

I am now going to relate wonderful things; but they rest on the report, strangely consistent, it is true, of Sir Bale Mardykes. That all his senses, however, were sick and feverish, and his brain by no means to be relied on at that moment, is a fact of which sceptics have a right to make all they please and can.

Startled at their approach, a bird like a huge mackaw started from the boughs of the trees, and sped away toward the shelter of the forest, fluttering and hopping close by the side of the little brook which, emerging from the forest, winds into the glen, and beside the course of which Sir Bale and Philip Feltram had ascended from the margin of the lake.

It fluttered on, as if one of its wings were hurt, and kept hopping and bobbing and flying along the ground at its swiftest, screaming all the time discordantly.

'That must be old Mrs. Amerald's bird, that got away a week ago,' said Sir Bale, stopping and looking after it. 'Was not it a mackaw?'

'No,' said Feltram; 'that was a gray parrot; but there are strange birds in Cloostedd Forest, for my ancestors collected all that would live in our climate, and were at pains to find them the food and shelter they were accustomed to, until they grew hardy—that is how it happens.'

'By Jove, that's a secret worth knowing,' said Sir Bale. 'That

would make quite a feature. What a fat brute that bird was! and green and dusky-crimson and yellow; but its head is white—age, I suspect; and what a broken beak—hideous bird! splendid plumage; something between a mackaw and a vulture.'

Sir Bale spoke jocularly, but with the interest of a bird-fancier; a taste which, when young, he had indulged; and for the moment forgot his cares and the object of his unwonted excursion.

A moment after, a lank slim bird, perfectly white, started from the same boughs, and winged its way to the forest.

'A kite, I think; but its body is a little too long, isn't it?' said Sir Bale again, stopping and looking after its flight also.

'A foreign kite, I daresay,' said Feltram.

All this time there was hopping near them a jay, with the tameness of a bird accustomed to these solitudes. It peered over its slender wing curiously at the visitors, pecking here and nodding there; and thus hopping, it made a circle round them more than once. Then it fluttered up, and perched on a bough of the old oak, from the deep labyrinth of whose branches the other birds had emerged; and from thence it flew down and lighted on the old druidic stone, that stood like a cyclopean table on its sunken stone props, before the snakelike roots of the oak.

Across this it hopped conceitedly, as over a stage on which it figured becomingly; and after a momentary hesitation, with a little spring, it rose and winged its way in the same direction which the other birds had taken, and was quickly lost in the thick of the forest to the left.

'Here,' said Feltram, 'this is the tree.'

'I remember it well! A gigantic trunk; and, yes, those marks; but I never before read them as letters. Yes, H. F., so they are—very odd I should not have remarked them. They are so large, and so strangely drawn-out in some places, and filled-in in others, and distorted, and the moss has grown about them; I don't wonder I took them for natural cracks and chasms in the bark,' said Sir Bale.

'Very like,' said Feltram.

Sir Bale had remarked, ever since they had begun their walk from the shore, that Feltram seemed to undergo a gloomy change. Sharper, grimmer, wilder grew his features, and shadow after shadow darkened his face.

The solitude and grandeur of the forest, and the repulsive gloom of his companion's countenance and demeanour, communicated a tone of anxiety to Sir Bale; and they stood still, side by side, in total silence for a time, looking toward the forest glades; between themselves and which, on the level sward of the valley, stood many a noble tree and fantastic group of forked birch and thorn, in the irregular formations into which Nature had thrown them.

'Now you stand between the letters. Cast your eyes on the

stone,' said Feltram suddenly, and his low stern tones almost startled the Baronet.

Looking round, he perceived that he had so placed himself that his point of vision was exactly from between the two great letters, now half-obliterated, which he had been scrutinising just as he turned about to look toward the forest of Cloostedd.

'Yes, so I am,' said Sir Bale.

There was within him an excitement and misgiving, akin to the sensation of a man going into battle, and which corresponded with the sombre frown which Feltram wore, and the manifest change which had come upon him.

'Look on the stone steadily for a time, and tell me if you see a black mark, about the size of your hand, anywhere upon its surface,' said Feltram.

Sir Bale affected no airs of scepticism now; his imagination was stirred, and a sense of some unknown reality at the bottom of that which he had affected to treat before as illusion, inspired a strange interest in the experiment.

'Do you see it?' asked Feltram.

Sir Bale was watching patiently, but he had observed nothing of the kind.

Sharper, darker, more eager grew the face of Philip Feltram, as his eyes traversed the surface of that huge horizontal block.

'Now?' asked Feltram again.

No, he had seen nothing.

Feltram was growing manifestly uneasy, angry almost; he walked away a little, and back again, and then two or three times round the tree, with his hands shut, and treading the ground like a man trying to warm his feet, and so impatiently he returned, and looked again on the stone.

Sir Bale was still looking, and very soon said, drawing his brows together and looking hard,

'Ha!—yes—hush. There it is, by Jove!—wait—yes—there; it is growing quite plain.'

It seemed not as if a shadow fell upon the stone, but rather as if the stone became semi-transparent, and just under its surface was something dark—a hand, he thought it—and darker and darker it grew, and after some little wavering, it fixed itself movelessly, pointing, as he thought, toward the forest.

'It looks like a hand,' said he. 'By Jove, it *is* a hand—pointing towards the forest with a finger.'

'Don't mind the finger; look only on that black blurred mark, and from the point where you stand, taking that point for your direction, look to the forest. Take some tree or other landmark for an object, enter the forest there, and pursue the same line, as well as you can, until you find little flowers with leaves like wood-sorrel,

and with tall stems and a red blossom, such as you have not seen before, growing among the trees, and follow where they seem to grow thickest, and there you will find him.'

All the time that Feltram was making this little address, Sir Bale was endeavouring to fix his route by such indications as Feltram described; and when he had succeeded in quite establishing the form of a peculiar tree—a melancholy ash, one huge limb of which had been blasted by lightning, and its partly stricken arm stood high and barkless, stretching its white fingers, as it were, into the forest, and signing the way for him—

'I have it now,' said he. 'Come, Feltram, you'll come a bit of the way with me.'

Feltram made no answer, but slowly shook his head, and turned and walked away, leaving Sir Bale to undertake his adventure alone.

The strange sound they had heard from the midst of the forest, like the rumble of a storm or the distant roar of a furnace, had quite ceased. Not a bird was hopping on the grass, or visible on bough or in the sky. Not a living creature was in sight—never was stillness more complete, or silence more oppressive.

It would have been ridiculous to give way to the odd reluctance which struggled within him. Feltram had strode down the slope, and was concealed by a screen of bushes from his view. So quite alone, and full of an interest quite new to him, he set out in quest of his adventures.

Chapter XX.

THE HAUNTED FOREST.

Sir Bale Mardykes walked in a straight line, by bush and scaur, over the undulating ground, to the blighted ash-tree; and as he approached it, its withered bough stretched more gigantically into the air, and the forest seemed to open where it pointed.

He passed it by, and in a few minutes had lost sight of it again, and was striding onward under the shadow of the forest, which already enclosed him. He was directing his march with all the care he could, in exactly that line which, according to Feltram's rule, had been laid down for him. Now and then, having, as soldiers say, taken an object, and fixed it well in his memory, he would pause and look about him.

As a boy he had never entered the wood so far; for he was under a prohibition, lest he should lose himself in its intricacies, and be benighted there. He had often heard that the wood was haunted, and that too would, when a boy, have deterred him. It was on this account that the scene was so new to him, and that he cared so often to stop and look about him. Here and there a vista opened, exhibiting the same utter desertion, and opening farther perspectives through the tall stems of the trees faintly seen in the solemn shadow. No

flowers could he see, but once or twice a wood anemone, and now and then a tiny grove of wood-sorrel.

Huge oak-trees now began to mingle and show themselves more and more frequently among the other timber; and gradually the forest became a great oak wood unintruded upon by any less noble tree. Vast trunks curving outwards to the roots, and expanding again at the branches, stood like enormous columns, striking out their groining boughs, with the dark vaulting of a crypt.

As he walked under the shadow of these noble trees, suddenly his eye was struck by a strange little flower, nodding quite alone by the knotted root of one of those huge trees.

He stooped and picked it up, and as he plucked it, with a harsh scream just over his head, a large bird with heavy beating wings broke away from the midst of the branches. He could not see it, but he fancied the scream was like that of the huge mackaw whose ill-poised flight he had watched. This conjecture was but founded on the odd cry he had heard.

The flower was a curious one—a stem fine as a hair supported a little bell, that looked like a drop of blood, and never ceased trembling. He walked on, holding this in his fingers; and soon he saw another of the same odd type, then another at a shorter distance, then one a little to the right and another to the left, and farther on a little group, and at last the dark slope was all over trembling with these little bells, thicker and thicker as he descended a gentle declivity to the bank of the little brook, which flowing through the forest loses itself in the lake. The low murmur of this forest stream was almost the first sound, except the shriek of the bird that startled him a little time ago, which had disturbed the profound silence of the wood since he entered it. Mingling with the faint sound of the brook, he now heard a harsh human voice calling words at intervals, the purport of which he could not yet catch; and walking on, he saw, seated upon the grass, a strange figure, corpulent, with a great hanging nose, the whole face glowing like copper. He was dressed in a bottle-green cut-velvet coat, of the style of Queen Anne's reign, with a dusky crimson waistcoat, both overlaid with broad and tarnished gold lace, and his silk stockings on thick swollen legs, with great buckled shoes, straddling on the grass, were rolled up over his knees to his short breeches. This ill-favoured old fellow, with a powdered wig that came down to his shoulders, had a dice-box in each hand, and was apparently playing his left against his right, and calling the throws with a hoarse cawing voice.

Raising his black piggish eyes, he roared to Sir Bale, by name, to come and sit down, raising one of his dice-boxes, and then indicating a place on the grass opposite to him.

Now Sir Bale instantly guessed that this was the man, gipsy, warlock, call him what he might, of whom he had come in search.

With a strange feeling of curiosity, disgust, and awe, he drew near. He was resolved to do whatever this old man required of him, and to keep him, this time, in good humour.

Sir Bale did as he bid him, and sat down; and taking the box he presented, they began throwing turn about, with three dice, the copper-faced old man teaching him the value of the throws, as he proceeded, with many a curse and oath; and when he did not like a throw, grinning with a look of such real fury, that the master of Mardykes almost expected him to whip out his sword and prick him through as he sat before him.

After some time spent at this play, in which guineas passed now this way, now that, chucked across the intervening patch of grass, or rather moss, that served them for a green cloth, the old man roared over his shoulder,

'Drink;' and picking up a long-stemmed conical glass which Sir Bale had not observed before, he handed it over to the Baronet; and taking another in his fingers, he held it up, while a very tall slim old man, dressed in a white livery, with powdered hair and cadaverous face, which seemed to run nearly all into a long thin hooked nose, advanced with a flask in each hand. Looking at the unwieldly old man, with his heavy nose, powdered head, and all the bottle-green, crimson, and gold about him, and the long slim serving-man, with sharp beak, and white from head to heel, standing by him, Sir Bale was forcibly reminded of the great old macaw and the long slender kite, whose colours they, after their fashion, reproduced, with something, also indescribable, of the air and character of the birds. Not standing on ceremony, the old fellow held up his own glass first, which the white lackey filled from the flask, and then he filled Sir Bale's glass.

It was a large glass, and might have held about half a pint; and the liquor with which the servant filled it was something of the colour of an opal, and circles of purple and gold seemed to be spreading continually outward from the centre, and running inward from the rim, and crossing one another, so as to form a beautiful rippling net-work.

'I drink to your better luck next time,' said the old man, lifting his glass high, and winking with one eye, and leering knowingly with the other; 'and you know what I mean.'

Sir Bale put the liquor to his lips. Wine? Whatever it was, never had he tasted so delicious a flavour. He drained it to the bottom, and placing it on the grass beside him, and looking again at the old dicer, who was also setting down his glass, he saw, for the first time, the graceful figure of a young woman seated on the grass. She was dressed in deep mourning, had a black hood carelessly over her head, and, strangely, wore a black mask, such as are used at masquerades. So much of her throat and chin as he

could see were beautifully white; and there was a prettiness in her air and figure which made him think what a beautiful creature she in all likelihood was. She was reclining slightly against the burly man in bottle-green and gold, and her arm was round his neck, and her slender white hand showed itself over his shoulders.

'Ho! my little Geaiette,' cried the old fellow hoarsely; 'it will be time that you and I should get home.—So, Bale Mardykes, I have nothing to object to you this time; you've crossed the lake, and you've played with me and won and lost, and drank your glass like a jolly devil, and now we know one another; and an acquaintance is made that will last. I'll let you go, and you'll come when I want you. And now you'll want to know what horse will win next month at Rindermere races.—Whisper me, lass, and I'll tell him.'

So her lips, under the black curtain, crept close to his ear, and she whispered.

'It will be Rainbow,' said the old man harshly. 'And now make your best speed out of the forest, or I'll set my black dogs at your heels, ho, ho, ho! and we may chance to pull you down. Away!'

He cried this last order with a look so black and so savage a shake of his huge fist, that Sir Bale, merely making his general bow to the group, clapped his hat on his head, and hastily began his retreat; but the same discordant voice yelled after him:

'You'll want that, you fool; pick it up.' And there came hurtling after him a great leather bag, stained, and stuffed with a heavy burden, and bounding by him it stopped with a little wheel that brought it exactly before his feet.

He picked it up, and found it heavy.

Turning about to make his acknowledgments, he saw the two persons in full retreat; the profane old scoundrel in the bottle-green limping and stumbling, yet bowling along at a wonderful rate, with many a jerk and reel, and the slender lady in black gliding away by his side into the inner depths of the forest.

So Sir Bale, with a strange chill, and again in utter solitude, pursued his retreat, with his burden, at a swifter pace, and after an hour or so had recovered the point where he had entered the forest, and passing by the druidic stone and the mighty oak, saw down the glen at his right, standing by the edge of the lake, Philip Feltram, close to the bow of the boat.

Chapter XXI.

RINDERMERE.

Feltram looked grim and agitated when Sir Bale came up to him, as he stood on the flat stone by which the boat was moored.

'You found him?' said he.

'Yes.'

'And the lady in black was there?'

'She was.'

'And you played with him?'

'Yes.'

'And what is that in your hand?'

'A bag of something, I fancy money; it is heavy; he threw it after me. We shall see just now; let us get away.'

'He gave you some of his wine to drink?' said Feltram, looking darkly in his face; but there was a laugh in his eyes.

'Yes; of course I drank it; my object was to please him.'

'To be sure.'

The faint wind that carried them across the lake had quite subsided by the time they had reached the side where they now were.

There was now not wind enough to fill the sail, and it was already evening.

'Give me an oar; we can pull her over in little more than an hour,' said Sir Bale; 'only let us get away.'

He got into the boat, sat down, and placed the leather bag with its heavy freightage at his feet, and took an oar. Feltram loosed the rope and shoved the boat off; and taking his seat also, they began to pull together, without another word, until, in about ten minutes, they had got a considerable way off the Cloostedd shore.

The leather bag was too clumsy a burden to conceal; besides, Feltram knew all about the transaction, and Sir Bale had no need to make a secret. The bag was old and soiled, and tied about the 'neck' with a long leather thong, and it seemed to have been sealed with red wax, fragments of which were still sticking to it.

He got it open, and found it full of guineas.

'Halt!' cried Sir Bale, delighted, for he had half apprehended a trick upon his hopes; 'gold it is, and a lot of it, by Jove!'

Feltram did not seem to take the slightest interest in the matter. Sulkily and drowsily he was leaning with his elbow on his knee, and it seemed thinking of something far away. Sir Bale could not wait to count them any longer. He reckoned them on the bench, and found two thousand.

It took some time; and when he had got them back into the leather bag, and tied them up again, Feltram, with a sudden start, said sharply,

'Come, take your oar—unless you like the lake by night; and see, there will soon be a wind up from Golden Friars!'

He cast a wild look towards Mardykes Hall and Snakes Island, and applying himself to his oar, told Sir Bale to take his also; and nothing loath, the Baronet did so.

It was slow work, for the boat was not built for speed; and by the time they had got about midway, the sun went down, and twi-

light and the melancholy flush of the sunset tints were upon the lake and fells.

'Ho! here comes the breeze—up from Golden Friars,' said Feltram; 'we shall have enough to fill the sails now. If you don't fear spirits and Snakes Island, it is all the better for us it should blow from that point. If it blew from Mardykes now, it would be a stiff pull for you and me to get this tub home.'

Talking as if to himself, and laughing low, he adjusted the sail and took the tiller, and so, yielding to the rising breeze, the boat glided slowly toward still distant Mardykes Hall.

The moon came out, and the shore grew misty, and the towering fells rose like sheeted giants; and leaning on the gunwale of the boat, Sir Bale, with the rush and gurgle of the water on the boat's side sounding faintly in his ear, thought of his day's adventure, which seemed to him like a dream—incredible but for the heavy bag that lay between his feet.

As they passed Snakes Island, a little mist, like a fragment of a fog, seemed to drift with them, and Sir Bale fancied that whenever it came near the boat's side she made a dip, as if strained toward the water; and Feltram always put out his hand, as if waving it from him, and the mist seemed to obey the gesture; but returned again and again, and the same thing always happened.

It was three weeks after, that Sir Bale, sitting up in his bed, very pale and wan, with his silk night-cap nodding on one side, and his thin hand extended on the coverlet, where the doctor had been feeling his pulse, in his darkened room, related all the wonders of this day to Doctor Torvey. The doctor had attended him through a fever which followed immediately upon his visit to Cloostedd.

'And, my dear sir, by Jupiter, can you really believe all that delirium to be sober fact?' said the doctor, sitting by the bedside, and actually laughing.

'I can't help believing it, because I can't distinguish in any way between all that and everything else that happened, and which I must believe. And, except that this is more wonderful, I can find no reason to reject it, that does not as well apply to all the rest.'

'Come, come, my dear sir, this will never do—nothing is more common. These illusions accompanying fever frequently antedate the attack, and the man is actually raving before he knows he is ill.'

'But what do you make of that bag of gold?'

'Some one has lent it. You had better ask all about it of Feltram when you can see him; for in speaking to me he seemed to know all about it, and certainly did not seem to think the matter at all out of the commonplace. It is just like that fisherman's story, about the hand that drew Feltram into the water on the night he was nearly drowned. Every one can see what that was. Why of course it was simply the reflection of his own hand in the water, in

that vivid lightning. When you have been out a little and have gained strength you will shake off these dreams.'

'I should not wonder,' said Sir Bale.

It is not to be supposed that Sir Bale reported all that was in his memory respecting his strange vision, if such it was, at Cloostedd. He made a selection of the incidents, and threw over the whole adventure an entirely accidental character, and described the money which the old man had thrown to him as amounting to a purse of five guineas, and mentioned nothing of the passages which bore on the coming race.

Good Doctor Torvey, therefore, reported only that Sir Bale's delirium had left two or three illusions sticking in his memory.

But if they were illusions, they survived the event of his recovery, and remained impressed on his memory with the sharpness of very recent and accurately observed fact.

He was resolved on going to the races of Rindermere, where, having in his possession so weighty a guarantee as the leather purse, he was determined to stake it all boldly on Rainbow—against which horse he was glad to hear there were very heavy odds.

The race came off. One horse was scratched, another bolted, the rider of a third turned out to have lost a buckle and three halfpence, and so was an ounce and a half under weight, a fourth knocked down the post near Rinderness churchyard, and was held to have done it with his left instead of his right knee, and so had run at the wrong side. The result was that Rainbow came in first, and I should be afraid to say how much Sir Bale won. It was a sum that paid off a heavy debt, and left his affairs in a much more manageable state.

From this time Sir Bale prospered. He visited Cloostedd no more; but Feltram often crossed to that lonely shore as heretofore, and it is believed conveyed to him messages which guided his betting. One thing is certain, his luck never deserted him. His debts disappeared; and his love of Continental life seemed to have departed. He became content with Mardykes Hall, laid out money on it, and although he never again cared to cross the lake, he seemed to like the scenery.

In some respects, however, he lived exactly the same odd and unpopular life. He saw no one at Mardykes Hall. He practised a very strict reserve. The neighbours laughed at and disliked him, and he was voted, whenever any accidental contact arose, a very disagreeable man; and he had a shrewd and ready sarcasm that made them afraid of him, and himself more disliked.

Odd rumours prevailed also about his household. It was said that his old relations with Philip Feltram had become reversed; and that he was as meek as a mouse, and Feltram the bully now. It was also said that Mrs. Julaper had, one Sunday evening when she drank tea at the Vicar's, told his good lady very mysteriously, and

with many charges of secrecy, that Sir Bale was none the better of his late-found wealth; that he had a load upon his spirits, that he was afraid of Feltram, and so was every one else, more or less, in the house; that he was either mad or worse; and that it was an eerie dwelling, and strange company, and she should be glad herself of a change.

Good Mrs. Bedel told her friend Mrs. Torvey; and all Golden Friars heard all this, and a good deal more, in an incredibly short time.

All kinds of rumours now prevailed in Golden Friars, connecting Sir Bale's successes on the turf with some mysterious doings in Cloostedd Forest. Philip Feltram laughed when he heard these stories—especially when he heard the story that a supernatural personage had lent the Baronet a purse full of money.

'You should not talk to Doctor Torvey so, sir,' said he grimly; 'he's the greatest tattler in the town. It was old Farmer Trebeck, who could buy and sell us all down here, who lent that money. Partly from good-will, but not without acknowledgment. He has my hand for the first, not worth much, and yours to a bond for the two thousand guineas you brought home with you. It seems strange you should not remember that venerable and kind old farmer whom you talked with so long that day. His grandson, who expects to stand well in his will, being a trainer in Lord Varney's stables, has sometimes a wrinkle to give, and he is the source of your information.'

'By Jove, I must be a bit mad, then, that's all,' said Sir Bale, with a smile and a shrug.

Philip Feltram moped about the house, and did precisely what he pleased. The change which had taken place in him became more and more pronounced. Dark and stern he always looked, and often malignant. He was like a man possessed of one evil thought which never left him.

There was, besides, the good old Gothic superstition of a bargain or sale of the Baronet's soul to the arch-fiend. This was, of course, very cautiously whispered in a place where he had influence. It was only a coarser and directer version of a suspicion, that in a more credulous generation penetrated a level of society quite exempt from such follies in our day.

One evening at dusk, Sir Bale, sitting after his dinner in his window, saw the tall figure of Feltram, like a dark streak, standing movelessly by the lake. An unpleasant feeling thrilled him, and then an impatience. He got up, and having primed himself with two glasses of brandy, walked down to the edge of the lake, and placed himself beside Feltram.

'Looking down from the window,' said he, nerved with his Dutch courage, 'and seeing you standing like a post, do you know what I began to think of?'

Feltram looked at him, but answered nothing.

'I began to think of taking a wife—*marrying*.'

Feltram nodded. The announcement had not produced the least effect.

'Why the devil will you make me so uncomfortable! can't you be like yourself—what you *were*, I mean? I won't go on living here alone with you. I'll take a wife, I tell you. I'll choose a good church-going woman, that will have every man, woman, and child in the house on their marrowbones twice a day, morning and evening, and three times on Sundays. How will you like that?'

'Yes, you will be married,' said Feltram, with a quiet decision which chilled Sir Bale, for he had by no means made up his mind to that desperate step.

Feltram slowly walked away, and that conversation ended.

Now an odd thing happened about this time. There was a family of Feltram—county genealogists could show how related to the vanished family of Cloostedd—living at that time on their estate not far from Carlisle. Three co-heiresses now represented it. They were great beauties—the belles of their county in their day.

One was married to Sir Oliver Haworth of Haworth, a great family in those times. He was a knight of the shire, and had refused a baronetage, and, it was said, had his eye on a peerage. The other sister was married to Sir William Walsingham, a wealthy baronet; and the third and youngest, Miss Janet, was still unmarried, and at home at Cloudesly Hall, where her aunt, Lady Harbottle, lived with her, and made a dignified chaperon.

Now it so fell out that Sir Bale, having business at Carlisle, and knowing old Lady Harbottle, paid his respects at Cloudesly Hall; and being no less than five-and-forty years of age, was, for the first time in his life, seriously in love.

Miss Janet was extremely pretty—a fair beauty with brilliant red lips and large blue eyes, and ever so many pretty dimples when she talked and smiled. It was odd, but not perhaps against the course of nature, that a man, though so old as he, and quite *blasé*, should fall at last under that fascination.

But what are we to say of the strange infatuation of the young lady? No one could tell why she liked him. It was a craze. Her family were against it, her intimates, her old nurse—all would not do; and the oddest thing was, that he seemed to take no pains to please her. The end of this strange courtship was that he married her; and she came home to Mardykes Hall, determined to please everybody, and to be the happiest woman in England.

With her came a female cousin, a good deal her senior, past thirty,—Gertrude Mainyard, pale and sad, but very gentle, and with all the prettiness that can belong to her years.

This young lady has a romance. Her hero is far away in India;

and she, content to await his uncertain return with means to accomplish the hope of their lives, in that frail chance has long embarked all the purpose and love of her life.

When Lady Mardykes came home, a new leaf was, as the phrase is, turned over. The neighbours and all the country people were willing to give the Hall a new trial. There was visiting and returning of visits; and young Lady Mardykes was liked and admired. It could not indeed have been otherwise. But here the improvement in the relations of Mardykes Hall with other homes ceased. On one excuse or another Sir Bale postponed or evaded the hospitalities which establish intimacies. Some people said he was jealous of his young and beautiful wife. But for the most part his reserve was set down to the old inhospitable cause, some ungenial defect in his character; and in a little time the tramp of horses and roll of carriage-wheels were seldom heard up or down the broad avenue of Mardykes Hall.

Sir Bale liked this seclusion; and his wife, 'so infatuated with her idolatry of that graceless old man,' as surrounding young ladies said, that she was well content to forego the society of the county people for a less interrupted enjoyment of that of her husband. 'What she could see in him' to interest or amuse her so, that for his sake she was willing to be 'buried alive in that lonely place,' the same critics were perpetually wondering.

A year and more passed thus; for the young wife, happily—*very* happily indeed, had it not been for one topic on which she and her husband could not agree. This was Philip Feltram; and an odd quarrel it was.

Chapter XXII.

SIR BALE IS FRIGHTENED.

To Feltram she had conceived, at first sight, a horror. It was not a mere antipathy; fear mingled largely in it. Although she did not see him often, this restless dread grew upon her so, that she urged his dismissal upon Sir Bale, offering to provide herself for him a handsome annuity, charged on that part of her property which, by her marriage-settlement, had remained in her power. There was a time when Sir Bale was only too anxious to get rid of him. But that was changed now. Nothing could now induce the Baronet to part with him. He at first evaded and resisted quietly. But, urged with a perseverance to which he was unused, he at last broke into fury that appalled her, and swore that if he was worried more upon the subject, he would leave her and the country, and see neither again. This exhibition of violence affrighted her all the more by reason of the contrast; for up to this he had been an uxorious husband. Lady Mardykes was in hysterics, and thoroughly frightened, and remained in her room for two or three days. Sir Bale went up

to London about business, and was not home for more than a week. This was the first little squall that disturbed the serenity of their sky.

This point, therefore, was settled; but soon there came other things to sadden Lady Mardykes. There occurred a little incident, soon after Sir Bale's return from London, which recalled the topic on which they had so nearly quarrelled.

Sir Bale had a dressing-room, remote from the bedrooms, in which he sat and read and sometimes smoked. One night, after the house was all quiet, the Baronet being still up, the bell of this dressing-room rang long and furiously. It was such a peal as a person in extreme terror might ring. Lady Mardykes, with her maid in her room, heard it; and in great alarm she ran in her dressing-gown down the gallery to Sir Bale's room. Mallard the butler had already arrived, and was striving to force the door, which was secured. It gave way just as she reached it, and she rushed through.

Sir Bale was standing with the bell-rope in his hand, in the extremest agitation, looking like a ghost; and Philip Feltram was sitting in his chair, with a dark smile fixed upon him. For a minute she thought he had attempted to assassinate his master. She could not otherwise account for the scene.

There had been nothing of the kind, however; as her husband assured her again and again, as she lay sobbing on his breast, with her arms about his neck.

'To her dying hour,' she afterwards said to her cousin, 'she never could forget the dreadful look in Feltram's face.'

No explanation of that scene did she ever obtain from Sir Bale, nor any clue to the cause of the agony that was so powerfully expressed in his countenance. Thus much only she learned from him, that Feltram had sought that interview for the purpose of announcing his departure, which was to take place within the year.

'You are not sorry to hear that. But if you knew all, you might. Let the curse fly where it may, it will come back to roost. So, darling, let us discuss him no more. Your wish is granted, *dis iratis*.'

Some crisis, in this interview, seemed to have occurred in the relations between Sir Bale and Feltram. Henceforward they seldom exchanged a word; and when they did speak, it was coldly and shortly, like men who were nearly strangers.

One day in the courtyard, Sir Bale, seeing Feltram leaning upon the parapet that overlooks the lake, approached him, and said in a low tone,

'I've been thinking, if we—that is, *I*—do owe that money to old Trebeck, it is high time I should pay it. I was ill, and had lost my head at the time; but it turned out luckily, and it ought to be paid. I don't like the idea of a bond turning up, and a lot of interest.'

'The old fellow meant it for a present. He is richer than you are; he wished to give the family a lift. He has destroyed the bond, I believe, and in no case will he take payment.'

'No fellow has a right to force his money on another,' answered Sir Bale. 'I never asked him. Besides, as you know, I was not really myself, and the whole thing seems to me quite different from what you say it was; and, so far as my brain is concerned, it was all a phantasmagoria; but, as you say, it was he.'

'Every man is accountable for what he intends and for what he *thinks* he does,' said Feltram cynically.

'Well, I'm accountable for dealing with that wicked old dicer I *thought* I saw—isn't that it? But I must pay old Trebeck all the same, since the money was his. Can you manage a meeting?'

'Look down there. Old Trebeck has just landed; he will sleep to-night at the George and Dragon, to meet his cattle in the morning at Golden Friars fair. You can speak to him yourself.'

So saying, Feltram glided away, leaving to Sir Bale the task of opening the matter to the wealthy farmer of Cloostedd Fells.

A broad flight of steps leads down from the courtyard to the level of the jetty at the lake; and Sir Bale descended, and accosted the venerable farmer, who was bluff, honest, and as frank as a man can be who speaks a *patois* which hardly a living man but himself can understand.

Sir Bale asked him to come to the Hall and take luncheon; but Trebeck was in haste. Cattle had arrived which he wanted to look at, and a pony awaited him on the road hard by to Golden Friars; and the old fellow must mount and away.

Then Sir Bale, laying his hand upon his arm in a manner that was at once lofty and affectionate, told in his ears the subject on which he wished to be understood.

The old farmer looked hard at him, and shook his head and laughed in a way that would have been insupportable in a house, and told him, 'I hev narra bond o' thoine, mon.'

'I know how that is; so does Philip Feltram.'

'Well?'

'Well, I must replace the money.'

The old man laughed again, and in his outlandish dialect told him to wait till he asked him.

Sir Bale pressed it, but the old fellow put it off with outlandish banter; and as the Baronet grew testy, the farmer only waxed more and more hilarious, and at last, mounting his shaggy pony, rode off, still laughing, at a canter to Golden Friars; and when he reached Golden Friars, and got into the hall of the George and Dragon, he asked Richard Turnbull with a chuckle if he ever knew a man refuse an offer of money, or a man want to pay who did not owe; and inquired whether the Squire down at Mardykes Hall

mightn't be a bit 'wrang in t' garrets.' All this, however, other people said, was intended merely to conceal the fact that he really had, through sheer loyalty, lent the money, or rather bestowed it, thinking the old family in jeopardy, and meaning a gift, was determined to hear no more about it. I can't say; I only know people held, some by one interpretation, some by another.

As the caterpillar sickens and changes its hue when it is about to undergo its transmutation, so an odd change took place in Feltram. He grew even more silent and morose; he seemed always in an agitation and a secret rage. He used to walk through the woodlands on the slopes of the fells above Mardykes, muttering to himself, picking up the rotten sticks with which the ground was strewn, breaking them in his hands, and hurling them from him, and stamping on the earth as he paced up and down.

One night a thunder-storm came on, the wind blowing gently up from Golden Friars. It was a night black as pitch, illuminated only by the intermittent glare of the lightning. At the foot of the stairs Sir Bale met Feltram, whom he had not seen for some days. He had his cloak and hat on.

'I am going to Cloostedd to-night,' he said; 'and if all is as I expect, I sha'n't return. We remember all, you and I.' And he nodded and walked down the passage.

Sir Bale knew that a crisis had happened in his own life. He felt faint and ill, and returned to the room where he had been sitting. Throughout that melancholy night he did not go to his bed.

In the morning he learned that Marlyn, who had been out late, saw Feltram get the boat off, and sail towards the other side. The night was so dark that he could only see him start; but the wind was light and coming up the lake, so that without a tack he could easily make the other side.

Feltram did not return. The boat was found fast to the ring at Cloostedd landing-place.

Lady Mardykes was relieved, and for a time was happier than ever. It was different with Sir Bale; and afterwards her sky grew dark also.

Chapter XXIII.

A LADY IN BLACK.

Shortly after this, there arrived at the George and Dragon a stranger. He was a man somewhat past forty, embrowned by distant travel, and, his years considered, wonderfully good-looking. He had good eyes; his dark-brown hair had no sprinkling of gray in it; and his kindly smile showed very white and even teeth. He made many inquiries about neighbours, especially respecting Mardykes Hall; and the answers seemed to interest him profoundly. He inquired after Philip Feltram, and shed tears when he heard that

he was no longer at Mardykes Hall, and that Trebeck or other friends could give him no tidings of him.

And then he asked Richard Turnbull to show him to a quiet room; and then, taking the honest fellow by the hand, he said,

'Mr. Turnbull, don't you know me?'

'No, sir,' said the host of the George and Dragon, after a puzzled stare, 'I can't say I do, sir.'

The stranger smiled a little sadly, and shook his head; and with a little laugh, still holding his hand in a very friendly way, he said,

'I should have known you anywhere, Mr. Turnbull—anywhere on earth or water. Had you turned up on the Himalayas, or in a junk on the Canton river, or as a dervish in the mosque of St. Sophia, I should have recognised my old friend, and asked what news from Golden Friars. But of course I'm changed. You were a little my senior; and one advantage among many you have over your juniors is that you don't change as we do. I have played many a game of hand-ball in the inn-yard of the George, Mr. Turnbull. You often wagered a pot of ale on my play; you used to say I'd make the best player of fives, and the best singer of a song, within ten miles round the meer. You used to have me behind the bar when I was a boy, with more of an appetite than I have now. I was then at Mardykes Hall, and used to go back in old Marlyn's boat. Is old Marlyn still alive?'

'Ay, that—he—is,' said Turnbull slowly, as he eyed the stranger again very carefully. 'I don't know who you can be, sir, unless you are—the boy—William Feltram. La! he was seven or eight years younger that Philip. But, lawk!—Well—By Jen, and *be* you Willie Feltram? But no, you can't!'

'Ay, Mr. Turnbull, that very boy—Willie Feltram—even he, and no other; and now you'll shake hands with me, not so formally, but like an old friend.'

'Ay, that I will,' said honest Richard Turnbull, with a great smile, and a hearty grasp of his guest's hand; and they both laughed together, and the younger man's eyes, for he was an affectionate fool, filled up with tears.

'And I want you to tell me this,' said William, after they had talked a little quietly, 'now that there is no one to interrupt us, what has become of my brother Philip? I heard from a friend an account of his health that has caused me unspeakable anxiety.'

'His health was not bad; no, he was a hardy lad, and liked a walk over the fells, or a pull on the lake; but he was a bit daft, every one said, and a changed man; and, in troth, they say the air o' Mardykes don't agree with every one, no more than him. But that's a tale that's neither here nor there.'

'Yes,' said William, 'that was what they told me—his mind affected. God help and guard us! I have been unhappy ever since;

and if I only knew it was well with poor Philip, I think I should be too happy. And where is Philip now?'

'He crossed the lake one night, having took leave of Sir Bale. They thought he was going to old Trebeck's up the Fells. He likes the Feltrams, and likes the folk at Mardykes Hall—though those two familiars was not always o'er kind to one another. But Trebeck seed nowt o' him, nor no one else; and what has gone wi' him none can tell.'

'I heard that also,' said William with a deep sigh. 'But I hoped it had been cleared up by now, and something happier been known of the poor fellow by this time. I'd give a great deal to know—I don't know what I *would* not give to know—I'm so unhappy about him. And now, my good old friend, tell your people to get me a chaise, for I must go to Mardykes Hall; and, first, let me have a room to dress in.'

At Mardykes Hall a pale and pretty lady was looking out, alone, from the stone-shafted drawing-room window across the courtyard and the balustrade, on which stood many a great stone chalice with flowers, whose leaves were half shed and gone with the winds—emblem of her hopes. The solemn melancholy of the towering fells, the ripple of the lonely lake, deepened her sadness.

The unwonted sound of carriage-wheels awoke her from her reverie.

Before the chaise reached the steps, a hand from its window had seized the handle, the door was thrown open, and William Feltram jumped out.

She was in the hall, she knew not how; and, with a wild scream and a sob, she threw herself into his arms.

Here at last was an end of the long waiting, the dejection which had reached almost the point of despair. And like two rescued from shipwreck, they clung together in an agony of happiness.

William had come back with no very splendid fortune. It was enough, and only enough, to enable them to marry. Prudent people would have thought it, very likely, too little. But he was now home in England, with health unimpaired by his long sojourn in the East, and with intelligence and energies improved by the discipline of his arduous struggle with fortune. He reckoned, therefore, upon one way or other adding something to their income; and he knew that a few hundreds a year would make them happier than hundreds of thousands could other people.

It was five years since they had parted in France, where a journey of importance to the Indian firm, whose right hand he was, had brought him.

The refined tastes that are supposed to accompany gentle blood, his love of art, his talent for music and drawing, had accidentally attracted the attention of the little travelling-party which old Lady

Harbottle chaperoned. Miss Janet, now Lady Mardykes, learning that his name was Feltram, made inquiry through a common friend, and learned what interested her still more about him. It ended in an acquaintance, which his manly and gentle nature and his entertaining qualities soon improved into an intimacy.

Feltram had chosen to work his own way, being proud, and also prosperous enough to prevent his pride, in this respect, from being placed under too severe a pressure of temptation. He heard not from but of his brother, through a friend in London, and more lately from Gertrude, whose account of him was sad and even alarming.

When Lady Mardykes came in, her delight knew no bounds. She had already formed a plan for their future, and was not to be put off—William Feltram was to take the great grazing farm that belonged to the Mardykes estate; or, if he preferred it, to farm it for her, sharing the profits. She wanted something to interest her, and this was just the thing. It was hardly half-a-mile away, up the lake, and there was such a comfortable house and garden, and she and Gertrude could be as much together as ever almost; and, in fact, Gertrude and her husband could be nearly always at Mardykes Hall.

So eager and entreating was she, that there was no escape. The plan was adopted immediately on their marriage, and no happier neighbours for a time were ever known.

But was Lady Mardykes content? was she even exempt from that heartache which each mortal thinks he has all to himself? The longing of her life was for children; and again and again had her hopes been disappointed.

One tiny pretty little baby indeed was born, and lived for two years, and then died; and none had come to supply its place and break the childless silence of the great old nursery. That was her sorrow; a greater one than men can understand.

Another source of grief was this: that Sir Bale Mardykes conceived a dislike to William Feltram that was unaccountable. At first suppressed, it betrayed itself negatively only; but with time it increased; and in the end the Baronet made little secret of his wish to get rid of him. Many and ingenious were the annoyances he contrived; and at last he told his wife plainly that he wished William Feltram to find some other abode for himself.

Lady Mardykes pleaded earnestly, and even with tears; for if Gertrude were to leave the neighbourhood, she well knew how utterly solitary her own life would become.

Sir Bale at last vouchsafed some little light as to his motives. There was an old story, he told her, that his estate would go to a Feltram. He had an instinctive distrust of that family. It was a feeling not given him for nothing; it might be the means of defeat-

ing their plotting and strategy. Old Trebeck, he fancied, had a finger in it. Philip Feltram had told him that Mardykes was to pass away to a Feltram. Well, they might conspire; but he would take what care he could that the estate should not be stolen from his family. He did not want his wife stript of her jointure, or his children, if he had any, left without bread.

All this sounded very like madness; but the idea was first propounded by Philip Feltram. His own jealousy was at bottom founded on a superstition which he would not avow and could hardly define. He bitterly blamed himself for having permitted William Feltram to place himself where he was.

In the midst of these annoyances William Feltram was seriously thinking of throwing up the farm, and seeking similar occupation somewhere else.

One day, walking alone in the thick wood that skirts the lake near his farm, he was discussing this problem with himself; and every now and then he repeated his question, 'Shall I throw it up, and give him the lease back if he likes?' On a sudden he heard a voice near him say:

'Hold it, you fool!—hold hard, you fool!—hold it, you fool!'

The situation being lonely, he was utterly puzzled to account for the interruption, until on a sudden a huge parrot, green, crimson, and yellow, plunged from among the boughs over his head to the ground, and partly flying, and partly hopping and tumbling along, got lamely, but swiftly, out of sight among the thick underwood; and he could neither start it nor hear it any more. The interruption reminded him of that which befell Robinson Crusoe. It was more singular, however; for he owned no such bird; and its strangeness impressed the omen all the more.

He related it when he got home to his wife; and as people when living a solitary life, and also suffering, are prone to superstition, she did not laugh at the adventure, as in a healthier state of spirits, I suppose, she would.

They continued, however, to discuss the question together; and all the more industriously as a farm of the same kind, only some fifteen miles away, was now offered to all bidders, under another landlord. Gertrude, who felt Sir Bale's unkindness all the more that she was a distant cousin of his, as it had proved on comparing notes, was very strong in favour of the change, and had been urging it with true feminine ingenuity and persistence upon her husband. A very singular dream rather damped her ardour, however, and it appeared thus:

She had gone to her bed full of this subject; and she thought, although she could not remember having done so, had fallen asleep. She was still thinking, as she had been all the day, about leaving the farm. It seemed to her that she was quite awake, and a candle

burning all the time in the room, awaiting the return of her husband, who was away at the fair near Haworth; she saw the interior of the room distinctly. It was a sultry night, and a little bit of the window was raised. A very slight sound in that direction attracted her attention; and to her surprise she saw a jay hop upon the window-sill, and into the room.

Up sat Gertrude, surprised and a little startled at the visit of so large a bird, without presence of mind for the moment even to frighten it away, and staring at it, as they say, with all her eyes. A sofa stood at the foot of the bed; and under this the bird swiftly hopped. She extended her hand now to take the bell-rope at the left side of the bed, and in doing so displaced the curtains, which were open only at the foot. She was amazed there to see a lady dressed entirely in black, and with the old-fashioned hood over her head. She was young and pretty, and looked kindly at her, but with now and then the slight contraction of lips and eyebrows that indicates pain. This little twitching was momentary, and recurred, it seemed, about once or twice in a minute.

How it was that she was not frightened on seeing this lady, standing like an old friend at her bedside, she could not afterwards understand. Some influence besides the kindness of her look prevented any sensation of terror at the time. With a very white hand the young lady held a white handkerchief pressed to her bosom at the top of her bodice.

'Who are you?' asked Gertrude.

'I am a kinswoman, although you don't know me; and I have come to tell you that you must not leave Faxwell' (the name of the place) 'or Janet. Abide your fortune here. If you go, I will go with you; and I can make you fear me.'

Her voice was very distinct, but also very faint, with something undulatory in it, that seemed to enter Gertrude's head rather than her ear.

Saying this she smiled horribly, and, lifting her handkerchief, disclosed for a moment a great wound in her breast, in which Gertrude saw the head of a snake writhing.

Hereupon she uttered a wild scream of terror, and, diving under the bed-clothes, remained more dead than alive there, until her maid, alarmed by her cry, came in, and having searched the room, and shut the window at her desire, did all in her power to comfort her.

If this was a nightmare, and embodied only by a form of expression which in some states belongs to the imagination, a leading idea in the controversy in which her mind had long been employed, it had at least the effect of deciding her against leaving Faxwell. And so that point was settled; and unpleasant relations continued between the tenants of the farm and the master of Mardykes Hall.

To Lady Mardykes all this was very painful, although Sir Bale

did not insist upon making a separation between his wife and her cousin. But to Mardykes Hall that cousin came no more. Even Lady Mardykes thought it better to see her at Faxwell than to risk a meeting in the temper in which Sir Bale then was. And thus several years passed.

No tidings of Philip Feltram were heard; and, in fact, none ever reached that part of the world; and if it had not been highly improbable that he could have drowned himself in the lake without his body sooner or later having risen to the surface, it would have been concluded that he had either accidentally or by design made away with himself in its waters.

Over Mardykes Hall there was a gloom—no sound of children's voices was heard there, and even the hope of that merry advent had died out.

This disappointment had no doubt helped to fix in Sir Bale's mind the idea of the insecurity of his property, and the morbid fancy that William Feltram and old Trebeck were conspiring to seize it; than which, I need hardly say, no imagination more insane could have fixed itself in his mind.

In other things, however, Sir Bale was shrewd and sharp, a clear and rapid man of business, and although this was a strange whim, it was not so unnatural in a man who was by nature so prone to suspicion as Sir Bale Mardykes.

During the years, now seven, that had elapsed since the marriage of Sir Bale and Miss Janet Feltram, there had happened but one event, except the death of their only child, to place them in mourning. That was the decease of Sir William Walsingham, the husband of Lady Mardykes' sister. She now lived in a handsome old dower-house at Islington, and being wealthy made, now and then, an excursion to Mardykes Hall, in which she was sometimes accompanied by her sister Lady Haworth. Sir Oliver being a Parliament man was much in London and deep in politics and intrigue, and subject, as convivial rogues are, to occasional hard hits from the gout.

But change and separation had made no alteration in these ladies' mutual affections, and no three sisters were ever more attached.

Was Lady Mardykes happy with her lord? A woman so gentle and loving as she, is a happy wife with any husband who is not an absolute brute. There must have been, I suppose, some good about Sir Bale. His wife was certainly deeply attached to him. She admired his wisdom, and feared his inflexible will, and altogether made of him a domestic idol. To acquire this enviable position, I suspect there must be something not essentially disagreeable about a man. At all events, what her neighbours good-naturedly termed her infatuation continued, and indeed rather improved by time.

THE HAUNTED BARONET

BY J. S. LE FANU,
AUTHOR OF 'UNCLE SILAS,' ETC.

Chapter XXIV. An old Portrait.

Sir Bale—whom some people remembered a gay and convivial man, not to say a profligate one—had grown to be a very gloomy man indeed. There was something weighing upon his mind; and I daresay some of the good gossips of Golden Friars, had there been any materials for such a case, would have believed that Sir Bale had murdered Philip Feltram, and was now the victim of the worm and fire of remorse.

The gloom of the master of the house made his very servants gloomy, and the house itself looked sombre, as if it had been startled with strange and dismal sights.

Lady Mardykes was something of an artist. She had lighted lately, in an out-of-the-way room, upon a dozen or more old portraits. Several of these were full-lengths; and she was—with the help of her maid, both in long aprons, amid sponges and basins, soft handkerchiefs and varnish-pots and brushes—busy in removing the dust and smoke-stains, and in laying-on the varnish, which brought out the colouring, and made the transparent shadows yield up their long-buried treasures of finished detail.

Against the wall stood a full-length portrait as Sir Bale entered the room; having, for a wonder, a word to say to his wife.

'O,' said the pretty lady, turning to him in her apron, and with her brush in her hand, 'we are in such a pickle, Munnings and I, we have been cleaning these old pictures. Mrs. Julaper says they are the pictures that came from Cloostedd Hall long ago. They were buried in dust in the dark room in the clock-tower. Here is such a characteristic one. It has a long powdered wig—George the First or Second, I don't know which—and such a combination of colours, and such a face. It seems starting out of the canvas, and all but speaks. Do look; that is, I mean, Bale, if you can spare time.'

Sir Bale abstractedly drew near, and looked over his wife's shoulder on the full-length portrait that stood before him; and as he did so a strange expression for a moment passed over his face.

The picture represented a man of swarthy countenance, with signs of the bottle glowing through the dark skin; small fierce pig eyes, a rather flat pendulous nose, and a grim forbidding mouth, with a large mole a little above it. On the head hung one of those

full-bottomed powdered wigs that look like a cloud of cotton-wadding; a lace cravat was about his neck; he wore short black-velvet breeches with stockings rolled over them, a bottle-green coat of cut velvet, and a crimson waistcoat with long flaps; coat and waistcoat both heavily laced with gold. He wore a sword, and leaned upon a crutch-handled cane, and his figure and aspect indicated a swollen and gouty state. He could not be far from sixty. There was uncommon force in this fierce and forbidding-looking portrait. Lady Mardykes said,

'What wonderful dresses they wore! How like a fine magic-lantern figure he looks! What gorgeous colouring! it is like the plumage of a mackaw; and what a claw his hand is! and that huge broken beak of a nose! Isn't he like a wicked old mackaw?'

'Where did you find that?' said Sir Bale.

Surprised at his tone, she looked round, and was still more surprised at his looks.

'I told you, dear Bale, I found them in the clock-tower. I hope I did right; it was not wrong bringing them here? I ought to have asked. Are you vexed, Bale?'

'Vexed! not I. I only wish it was in the fire. I must have seen that picture when I was a child. I hate to look at it. I raved about it once, when I was ill. I don't know who it is; I don't remember when I saw it. I wish you'd tell them to burn it.'

'It is one of the Feltrams,' she answered. '"Sir Hugh Feltram" is on the frame at the foot; and old Mrs. Julaper says he was the father of the unhappy lady who was said to have been drowned near Snakes Island.'

'Well, suppose he is; there's nothing interesting in that. It is a disgusting picture. I connect it with my illness; and I think it is the kind of thing that would make any one half mad, if they only looked at it often enough. Tell them to burn it; and come away, come to the next room; I can't say what I want here.'

Sir Bale seemed to grow more and more agitated the longer he remained in the room. He seemed to her both frightened and furious; and taking her a little roughly by the wrist, he led her through the door.

When they were in another apartment alone, he again asked the affrighted lady who had told her that picture was there, and who told her to clean it.

She had only the truth to plead. It was, from beginning to end, the merest accident.

'If I thought, Janet, that you were taking counsel of others, talking me over, and trying clever experiments—' he stopped short with his eyes fixed on hers with black suspicion.

His wife's answer was one pleading look, and to burst into tears.

Sir Bale let-go her wrist, which he had held up to this; and placing his hand gently on her shoulder, he said,

'You must not cry, Janet; I have given you no excuse for tears. I only wished an answer to a very harmless question; and I am sure you would tell me, if by any chance you have lately seen Philip Feltram; he is capable of arranging all that. No one knows him as I do. There, you must not cry any more; but tell me truly, has he turned up? is he at Faxwell?'

She denied all this with perfect truth; and after a hesitation of some time, the matter ended. And so soon as she and he were more themselves, he had something quite different to tell her.

'Sit down, Janet; sit down, and forget that vile picture and all I have been saying. What I came to tell you, I think you will like; I am sure it will please you.'

And with this little preface he placed his arm about her neck, and kissed her tenderly. She certainly was pleased; and when his little speech was over, she, smiling, with her tears still wet upon her cheeks, put her arms round her husband's neck, and in turn kissed him with the ardour of gratitude, kissed him affectionately; again and again thanking him all the time.

It was no great matter, but from Sir Bale Mardykes it was something quite unusual.

Was it a sudden whim? what was it? Something had prompted Sir Bale, early in that dark shrewd month of December, to tell his wife that he wished to call together some of his county acquaintances, and to fill his house for a week or so, as near Christmas as she could get them to come. He wished her sisters—Lady Haworth (with her husband) and the Dowager Lady Walsingham—to be invited for an early day, before the coming of the other guests, so that she might enjoy their society for a little time quietly to herself before the less intimate guests should assemble.

Glad was Lady Mardykes to hear the resolve of her husband, and prompt to obey. She wrote to her sisters to beg of them to arrange to come together by the tenth or twelfth of the month, which they accordingly arranged to do. Sir Oliver, it is true, could not be of the party. A minister of state was drinking the waters at Bath; and Sir Oliver thought it would do him no harm to sip a little also, and his fashionable doctor politely agreed, and 'ordered' to those therapeutic springs the knight of the shire, who was 'consumedly vexed' to lose the Christmas with that jolly dog, Bale, down at Mardykes Hall. But a fellow must have a stomach for his Christmas pudding, and politics takes it out of a fellow deucedly; and health's the first thing, egad!

So Sir Oliver went down to Bath, and I don't know that he tippled much of the waters, but he did drink the burgundy of that haunt of the ailing; and he had the honour of making a fourth not unfrequently in the secretary of state's whist-parties.

It was about the 8th of December when, in Lady Walsingham's

carriage, intending to post all the way, that lady, still young, and Lady Haworth, with all the servants that were usual in such expeditions in those days, started from the great Dower House at Islington in high spirits.

Lady Haworth had not been very well—low and nervous; but the clear frosty sun, and the pleasant nature of the excursion, raised her spirits to the point of enjoyment; and expecting nothing but happiness and gaiety—for, after all, Sir Bale was but one of a large party, and even he could make an effort and be agreeable as well as hospitable on occasion—they set out on their northward expedition. The journey, which is a long one, they had resolved to break into a four days' progress; and the inns had been written to, bespeaking a comfortable reception.

Chapter XXV.

THROUGH THE WALL.

On the third night they put-up at the comfortable old inn called the Three Nuns. With an effort they might easily have pushed on to Mardykes Hall that night, for the distance is not more than five-and-thirty miles. But, considering her sister's health, Lady Walsingham in planning their route had resolved against anything like a forced march.

Here the ladies took possession of the best sitting-room; and, notwithstanding the fatigue of the journey, Lady Haworth sat up with her sister till near ten o'clock, chatting gaily about a thousand things.

Of the three sisters, Lady Walsingham was the eldest. She had been in the habit of taking the command at home; and now, for advice and decision, her younger sisters, less prompt and courageous than she, were wont, whenever in her neighbourhood, to throw upon her all the cares and agitations of determining what was best to be done in small things and great. It is only fair to say, in addition, that this submission was not by any means exacted; it was the deference of early habit and feebler will, for she was neither officious nor imperious.

It was now time that Lady Haworth, a good deal more fatigued than her sister, should take leave of her for the night.

Accordingly they kissed and bid each other good-night; and Lady Walsingham, not yet disposed to sleep, sat for some time longer in the comfortable room where they had taken their tea, amusing the time with the book that had, when conversation flagged, beguiled the weariness of the journey. Her sister had been in her room nearly an hour, when she became herself a little sleepy. She had lighted her candle, and was going to ring for her maid,

when, to her surprise, the door opened, and her sister Lady Haworth entered in a dressing-gown, looking frightened.

'My darling Mary!' exclaimed Lady Walsingham, 'what is the matter? are you well?'

'Yes, darling,' she answered, 'quite well; that is, I don't know what is the matter—I'm frightened.' She paused, listening, with her eyes turned towards the wall. 'O, darling Maud, I am so frightened! I don't know what it can be.'

'You must not be agitated, darling; there's nothing. You have been asleep, and I suppose you have had a dream. Were you asleep?'

Lady Haworth had caught her sister fast by the arm with both her hands, and was looking wildly in her face.

'Have *you* heard nothing?' she asked, again looking towards the wall of the room, as if she expected to hear a voice through it.

'Nonsense, darling; you are dreaming still. Nothing; there has been nothing to hear. I have been awake ever since; if there had been anything to hear, I could not have missed it. Come, sit down. Sip a little of this water; you are nervous, and over-tired; and tell me plainly, like a good little soul, what is the matter; for nothing has happened here; and you ought to know that the Three Nuns is the quietest house in England; and I'm no witch, and if you won't tell me what's the matter, I can't divine it.'

'Yes, of course,' said Mary, sitting down, and glancing round her wildly. 'I don't hear it now; *you* don't?'

'Do, my dear Mary, tell me what you mean,' said Lady Walsingham kindly but firmly.

Lady Haworth was holding the still untasted glass of water in her hand.

'Yes, I'll tell you; I have been so frightened! You are right; I had a dream, but I can scarcely remember anything of it, except the very end of it, when I wakened. But it was not the dream; only it was connected with what terrified me so. I was so tired when I went to bed, I thought I should have slept very soundly; and indeed I fell asleep immediately, and I must have slept quietly for a good while. How long is it since I left you?'

'More than an hour.'

'Yes, I must have slept a good while; for I don't think I have been ten minutes awake. How my dream began I don't know. I remember only that gradually it came to this: I was standing in a recess in a panelled gallery; it was lofty, and, I thought, belonged to a handsome but old-fashioned house. I was looking straight towards the head of a wide staircase, with a great oak banister. At the top of the stairs, as near to me, about, as that window there, was a thick short column of oak, on top of which was a candlestick. There was no other light but from that one candle; and there was a lady standing beside it, looking down the stairs, with her back turned towards

me; and from her gestures I should have thought speaking to people on a lower lobby, but whom from my place I could not see. I soon perceived that this lady was in great agony of mind; for she beat her breast and wrung her hands every now and then, and wagged her head slightly from side to side, like a person in great distraction. But one word she said I could not hear. Nor when she struck her hand on the banister, or stamped, as she seemed to do in her pain, upon the floor, could I hear any sound. I found myself somehow waiting upon this lady, and was watching her with awe and sympathy. But who she was I knew not, until turning towards me I plainly saw Janet's face, pale and covered with tears, and with such a look of agony as—O God!—I can never forget.'

'Pshaw! Mary darling, what is it but a dream! I have had a thousand more startling; it is only that you are so nervous just now.'

'But that is not all—nothing; what followed is so dreadful; for either there is something very horrible going on at Mardykes, or else I am losing my reason,' said Lady Haworth in increasing agitation. 'I wakened instantly in great alarm, but I suppose no more than I have felt a hundred times on awakening from a frightful dream. I sat up in my bed; I was thinking of ringing for Winnefred, my heart was beating so, but feeling better soon I changed my mind. All this time I heard a faint sound of a voice, as if coming through a thick wall. It came from the wall at the left side of my bed, and I fancied was that of some woman lamenting in a room separated from me by that thick partition. I could only perceive that it was a sound of crying mingled with ejaculations of misery, or fear, or entreaty. I listened with a painful curiosity, wondering who it could be, and what could have happened in the neighbouring rooms of the house; and as I looked and listened, I could distinguish my own name, but at first nothing more. That, of course, might have been an accident; and I knew there were many Marys in the world besides myself. But it made me more curious; and a strange thing struck me, for I was now looking at that very wall through which the sounds were coming. I saw that there was a window in it. Thinking that the rest of the wall might nevertheless be covered by another room, I drew the curtain of it and looked out. But there is no such thing. It is the outer wall the entire way along. And it is equally impossible of the other wall, for it is to the front of the house, and has two windows in it; and the wall that the head of my bed stands against has the gallery outside it all the way; for I remarked that as I came to you.'

'Tut, tut, Mary darling, nothing on earth is so deceptive as sound; this and fancy account for everything.'

'But hear me out, darling; I have not told you all. I began to hear the voice more clearly, and at last quite distinctly. It was

Janet's, and she was conjuring you by name, as well as me, to come to her to Mardykes, without delay, in her extremity; yes, *you*, just as vehemently as me. It was Janet's voice. It still seemed separated by the wall, but I heard every syllable now; and I never heard voice or words of such anguish. She was imploring of us to come on, without a moment's delay, to Mardykes; and crying that, if we were not with her, she should go mad.'

'Well, darling,' said Lady Walsingham, 'you see I'm included in this invitation as well as you, and should hate to disappoint Janet just as much; and I do assure you, in the morning you will laugh over this fancy with me; or rather, she will laugh over it with us, when we get to Mardykes. What you do want is rest, and a little sal-volatile.'

So saying she rang the bell for Lady Haworth's maid. Having comforted her sister, and made her take the nervous specific she recommended, she went with her to her room; and taking possession of the arm-chair by the fire, she told her that she would keep her company until she was fast asleep, and remain long enough to be sure that the sleep was not likely to be interrupted. Lady Haworth had not been ten minutes in her bed, when she raised herself with a start to her elbow, listening with parted lips and wild eyes, her trembling fingers behind her ears. With an exclamation of horror, she cried,

'There it is again, upbraiding us! I can't stay longer.'

She sprang from the bed, and rang the bell violently.

'Maud,' she cried in an ecstasy of horror, 'nothing shall keep me here, whether you go or not. I will set out the moment the horses are put to. If you refuse to come, Maud, mind the responsibility is yours—listen!' and with white face and starting eyes she pointed to the wall. 'Have you ears? don't you hear?'

The sight of a person in extremity of terror so mysterious, might have unnerved a ruder system than Lady Walsingham's. She was pale as she replied; for under certain circumstances those terrors which deal with the supernatural are more contagious than any others. Lady Walsingham still, in terms, held to her opinion; but the panic had touched her, and although she tried to smile, her face showed it.

'Well, dear Mary,' she said, 'as you will have it so, I see no good in resisting you longer. Here, it is plain, your nerves will not suffer you to rest. Let us go then, in heaven's name; and when you get to Mardykes Hall you will be relieved.'

All this time Lady Haworth was getting on her things, with the careless hurry of a person about to fly for her life; and Lady Walsingham issued her orders for horses, and the general preparations for resuming the journey.

It was now between ten and eleven; but the servant who rode

armed with them, according to the not unnecessary usage of the times, thought that with a little judicious bribing of postboys they might easily reach Mardykes Hall before three o'clock in the morning.

When the party set forward again, Lady Haworth was comparatively tranquil. She no longer heard the unearthly mimickry of her sister's voice; there remained only the fear and suspense which that illusion or visitation had produced.

Her sister, Lady Walsingham, after a brief effort to induce something like conversation, became silent. A thin sheet of snow had covered the darkened landscape, and some light flakes were still dropping. Lady Walsingham struck her repeater often in the dark, and inquired the distances frequently. She was anxious to get over the ground, though by no means fatigued. Something of the anxiety that lay heavy at her sister's heart had touched her own.

Chapter XXVI.

PERPLEXED.

The roads even then were good, and very good horses the posting-houses turned out; so that by dint of extra pay the rapid rate of travelling undertaken by the servant was fully accomplished in the first two or three stages.

While Lady Walsingham was continually striking her repeater in her ear, and as they neared their destination, growing in spite of herself more anxious, her sister's uneasiness showed itself in a less reserved way; for, cold as it was, with snowflakes actually dropping, Lady Haworth's head was perpetually out at the window, and when she drew it up, sitting again in her place, she would audibly express her alarms, and apply to her sister for consolation and confidence in her suspense.

Under its thin carpet of snow, the pretty village of Golden Friars looked strangely to their eyes. It had long been fast asleep, and both ladies were excited as they drew up at the steps of the George and Dragon, and with bell and knocker roused the slumbering household.

What tidings awaited them here? In a very few minutes the door was opened, and the porter staggered down, after a word with the driver, to the carriage-window, not half awake.

'Is Lady Mardykes well?' demanded Lady Walsingham.

'Is Sir Bale well?'

'Are all the people at Mardykes Hall quite well?'

With clasped hands Lady Haworth listened to the successive answers of these questions which her sister hastily put. The answers were all satisfactory. With a great sigh and a little laugh, Lady Walsingham placed her hand affectionately on that of her sister; who, saying, 'God be thanked!' began to weep.

'When had you last news from Mardykes?' asked Lady Walsingham.

'A servant was down here about four o'clock.'

'O! no one since?' said she in a disappointed tone.

No one had been from the great house since, but all were well then.

'They are early people, you know, dear; and it is dark at four, and that is as late as they could well have heard, and nothing could have happened since—very unlikely. We have come very fast; it is only a few minutes past two, darling.'

But each felt the chill and load of their returning anxiety.

While the people at the George were rapidly getting a team of horses to, Lady Walsingham contrived a moment for an order from the other window to her servant, who knew Golden Friars perfectly, to knock-up the people at Doctor Torvey's, and to inquire whether all were well at Mardykes Hall.

There he learned that a messenger had come for Doctor Torvey at ten o'clock, and that the Doctor had not returned since. There was no news, however, of any one's being ill; and the Doctor himself did not know what he was wanted about. While Lady Haworth was talking to her maid from the window next the steps, Lady Walsingham was, unobserved, receiving this information at the other.

It made her very uncomfortable.

In a few minutes more, however, with a team of fresh horses, they were again rapidly passing the distance between them and Mardykes Hall.

About two miles on, their drivers pulled-up, and they heard a voice talking with them from the roadside. A servant from the Hall had been sent with a note for Lady Walsingham, and had been ordered, if necessary, to ride the whole way to the Three Nuns to deliver it. The note was already in Lady Walsingham's hand; her sister sat beside her, and with the corner of the open note in her fingers, she read it breathlessly at the same time by the light of a carriage-lamp which the man held to the window. It said:

'My dearest love—my darling sister—dear sisters both!—in God's name, lose not a moment. I am so overpowered and *terrified*. I cannot explain; I can only implore of you to come with all the haste you can make. Waste no time, darlings. I hardly understand what I write. Only this, dear sisters; I feel that my reason will desert me, unless you come soon. You will not fail me now. Your poor distracted JANET.'

The sisters exchanged a pale glance, and Lady Haworth grasped her sister's hand.

'Where is the messenger?' asked Lady Walsingham.

A mounted servant came to the window.

'Is any one ill at home?' she asked.
'No, all were well—my lady, and Sir Bale—no one sick.'
'But the Doctor was sent for; what was that for?'
'I can't say, my lady.'
'You are quite certain that no one—think—*no* one is ill?'
'There is no one ill at the Hall, my lady, that I have heard of.'
'Is Lady Mardykes, my sister, still up?'
'Yes, my lady; and has her maid with her.'
'And Sir Bale, are you certain he is quite well?'
'Sir Bale is quite well, my lady; he has been busy settling papers to-night, and was as well as usual.'
'That will do, thanks,' said the perplexed lady; and to her own servant she added,
'On to Mardykes Hall with all the speed they can make. I'll pay them well, tell them.'
And in another minute they were gliding along the road at a pace which the muffled beating of the horses' hoofs on the thin sheet of snow that covered the road showed to have broken out of the conventional trot, and to resemble something more like a gallop.
And now they were under the huge trees, that looked black as hearse-plumes in contrast with the snow. The cold gleam of the lake in the moon which had begun to shine out now met their gaze; and the familiar outline of Snakes Island, its solemn timber bleak and leafless, standing in a group, seemed to watch Mardykes Hall with a dismal observation across the water. Through the gate and between the huge files of trees the carriage seemed to fly; and at last the steaming horses stood panting, nodding and snorting, before the steps in the courtyard.
There was a light in an upper window, and a faint light in the hall, the door of which was opened; and an old servant came down and ushered the ladies into the house.

Chapter XXVII.

THE HOUR.

Lightly they stepped over the snow that lay upon the broad steps, and entering the door saw the dim figure of their sister, already in the large and faintly-lighted hall. One candle in the hand of her scared maid, and one burning on the table, leaving the distant parts of that great apartment in total darkness, touched the figures with the odd sharp lights in which Schalken delighted; and a streak of chilly moonlight, through the open door, fell upon the floor, and was stretched like a white sheet at her feet. Lady Mardykes, with an exclamation of agitated relief, threw her arms, in turn, round the necks of her sisters, and hugging them, kissed them again and again, murmuring her thanks, calling them her

'blessed sisters,' and praising God for his mercy in having sent them to her in time, and altogether in a rapture of agitation and gratitude.

Taking them each by a hand, she led them into a large room, on whose panels they could see the faint twinkle of the tall gilded frames, and the darker indication of the old portraits, in which that interesting house abounds. The moonbeams, entering obliquely through the Tudor stone-shafts of the window and thrown upon the floor, reflected an imperfect light; and the candle which the maid who followed her mistress held in her hand shone dimly from the sideboard, where she placed it. Lady Mardykes told her that she need not wait.

'They don't know; they know only that we are in some great confusion; but—God have mercy on me!—nothing of the reality. Sit down, darlings; you are tired.'

She sat down between them on a sofa, holding a hand of each. They sat opposite the window, through which appeared the magnificent view commanded from the front of the house: in the foreground the solemn trees of Snakes Island, one great branch stretching upward, bare and moveless, from the side, like an arm raised to heaven in wonder or in menace towards the house; the lake, in part swept by the icy splendour of the moon, trembling with a dazzling glimmer, and farther off lost in blackness; the Fells rising from a base of gloom, into ribs and peaks white with snow, and looking against the pale sky, thin and transparent as a haze. Right across to the storied woods of Cloostedd, and the old domains of the Feltrams, this view extended.

Thus alone, their mufflers still on, their hands clasped in hers, they breathlessly listened to her strange tale.

Connectedly told it amounted to this:

Sir Bale seemed to have been relieved of some great anxiety about the time when, ten days before, he had told her to invite her friends to Mardykes Hall. This morning he had gone out for a walk with Trevor, his under-steward, to talk over some plans about thinning the woods at this side; and also to discuss practically a proposal, lately made by a wealthy merchant, to take a very long lease, on advantageous terms to Sir Bale as he thought, of the old park and chase of Cloostedd, with the intention of building there, and making it once more a handsome residence.

In the improved state of his spirits, Sir Bale had taken a shrewd interest in this negotiation; and was actually persuaded to cross the lake that morning with his adviser, and to walk over the grounds with him.

Sir Bale had seemed unusually well, and talked with great animation. He was more like a young man who had just attained his majority, and for the first time grasped his estates, than the grim

elderly Baronet who had been moping about Mardykes, and as much afraid as a cat of the water, for so many years.

As they returned to the boat, at the roots of that same scathed elm whose barkless bough had seemed, in his former visit to this old wood, to beckon him from a distance, like a skeleton arm, to enter the forest, he and his companion on a sudden missed an old map of the grounds which they had been consulting.

'We must have left it in the corner tower of Cloostedd House, which commands that view of the grounds, you remember; it would not do to lose it. It is the most accurate thing we have. I'll sit down here and rest a little till you come back.'

The man was absent little more than twenty minutes. When he returned he found that Sir Bale had changed his position, and was now walking to and fro, around and about, in what at a distance he fancied was mere impatience, on the open space a couple of hundred paces nearer to the turn in the valley towards the boat. It was not impatience. He was very much agitated. He looked very pale, and he took his companion's arm—a thing he had never thought of doing before—and said,

'Let us get away quickly. I've something to tell at home, and —I forgot it.'

Not another word did Sir Bale exchange with his companion. He sat in the stern of the boat, gloomy as a man about to glide under traitor's-gate. He entered his house in the same sombre and agitated state. He entered his library, and sat for a long time as if stunned.

At last he seemed to have made-up his mind to something; and applied himself quietly and diligently to arranging papers, docketing some and burning others. Dinner-time arrived. He sent to tell Lady Mardykes that he should not join her at dinner, but would see her afterwards.

'It was between eight and nine, I forget the exact time, when he came to the tower drawing-room where I was. I did not hear his approach. There is a stone stair, with a thick carpet on it. He told me he wished to speak to me there. It is an out-of-the-way place—a small old room with very thick walls, and there is a double door, the inner one of oak—I suppose he wished to guard against being overheard.

'There was a look in his face that frightened me; I saw he had something dreadful to tell. He looked like a man on whom a lot had fallen to put some one to death,' said Lady Mardykes. 'O, my poor Bale! my husband, my husband! My God! he knew what it would be to me.'

Here she broke into the wildest weeping, and it was some time before she resumed.

'He seemed very kind and very calm,' she said at last; 'he said

but little; and, I think, these were his words: "I find, Janet, I have made a great miscalculation—I thought my hour of danger had passed. We have been many years together, but a parting must sooner or later be, and my time has come."

'I don't know what I said. I would not have so much minded—for I could not have believed, if I had not seen him—but there was that in his look and tone which no one could doubt.

"I shall die before to-morrow morning," he said. "You must command yourself, Janet; it can't be altered now."

"O, Bale," I cried, nearly distracted, "you would not kill yourself!"

"Kill myself! poor child! no, indeed," he said; "it is simply that I must die. No violent death—nothing but the common subsidence of life—I have made up my mind; what happens to everybody can't be so very bad; and millions of worse men than I die every year. You must not follow me to my room, darling; I shall see you by and by."

'His language was collected and even cold; but his face looked as if it was cut in stone; you never saw, in a dream, a face like it.'

Lady Walsingham here said,

'I am certain he is ill; he's in a fever. You must not distract and torture yourself about his predictions. You sent for Doctor Torvey; what did he say?'

'I could not tell him all.'

'O, no; I don't mean that; they'd only say he was mad, and we little better for minding what he says. But did the Doctor see him? and what did he say of his health?'

'Yes; he says there is nothing wrong—no fever—nothing whatever. Poor Bale has been so kind; he saw him to please me,' she sobbed again wildly. 'I wrote to implore of him. It was my last hope, strange as it seems; and O, would to God I could think it! But there is nothing of that kind. Wait till you have seen him. There is a frightful calmness about all he says and does; and his directions are all so clear, and his mind so perfectly collected, it is quite impossible.'

And poor Lady Mardykes again burst into a frantic agony of tears.

Chapter XXVIII.

SIR BALE IN THE GALLERY.

'Now, Janet darling, you are yourself low and nervous, and you treat this fancy of Bale's as seriously as he does himself. The truth is, he is a hypochondriac, as the doctors say; and you will find that I am right; he will be quite well in the morning, and I daresay a little ashamed of himself for having frightened his poor little wife as he has. I will sit up with you. But our poor Mary is not, you

know, very strong; and she ought to lie down and rest a little. Suppose you give me a cup of tea in the drawing-room. I will run up to my room and get these things off, and meet you in the drawing-room; or, if you like it better, you can sit with me in my own room; and for goodness' sake let us have candles enough, and a bright fire; and I promise you, if you will only exert your own good sense, you shall be a great deal more cheerful in a very little time.'

Lady Walsingham's address was kind and cheery, and her air confident. For a moment a ray of hope returned, and her sister Janet acknowledged at least the possibility of her theory. But if confidence is contagious, so also is panic; and Lady Walsingham experienced a sinking of the heart which she dared not confess to her sister, and vainly strove to combat.

Lady Walsingham went up with her sister Mary, and having seen her in her room, and spoken again to her in the same cheery tone in which she had lectured her sister Lady Mardykes, she went on; and having taken possession of her own room, and put off her cloaks and shawls, she was going downstairs again, when she heard Sir Bale's voice, as he approached along the gallery, issuing orders to a servant, as it seemed, exactly in his usual tone.

She turned, with a strange throb at her heart, and met him.

A little sterner, a little paler than usual he looked; she could perceive no other change. He took her hand kindly and held it, as with dilated eyes he looked with a dark inquiry for a moment in her face. He signed to the servant to go on, and said, 'I'm glad you have come, Maud. You have heard what is to happen; and I don't know how Janet could have borne it without your support. You did right to come; and you'll stay with her for a day or two, and take her away from this place as soon as you can.'

She looked at him with the embarrassment of fear. He was speaking to her with the calmness of a leave-taking in the press-room — the serenity that overlies the greatest awe and agony of which human nature is capable.

'I am glad to see you, Bale,' she began, hardly knowing what she said, and she stopped short.

'You are come, it turns out, on a sad mission,' he resumed; 'you find all in confusion. Poor Janet! it is a blow to her. I shall not live to see to-morrow's sunshine.'

'Come,' she said, startled, 'you must not talk so. No, Bale, you have no right to speak so; you can have no reason to justify it. It is cruel and wicked to trifle with your wife's feelings. If you are under a delusion, you must make an effort and shake it off, or, at least, cease to talk of it. You are not well; I know by your looks you are ill; but I am very certain we shall see you much better to-morrow, and still better the day following.'

'No, I'm not ill, sister. Feel that pulse, if you doubt me;

there is no fever in it. I never was more perfectly in health; and yet I know that before the clock, that has just struck three, shall have struck five, I, who am talking to you, shall be dead.'

Lady Walsingham was frightened, and her fear irritated her.

'I have told you what I think and believe,' she said vehemently. 'I think it wrong and cowardly to torture my poor sister with your whimsical predictions. Look into your own mind, and you will see you have absolutely no reason to support what you say. How *can* you inflict all this agony upon a poor creature foolish enough to love you as she does, and weak enough to believe in your idle dreams?'

'Stay, sister; it is not a matter to be debated so. If to-morrow I can hear you, it will be time enough to upbraid me. Pray return now to your sister; she needs all you can do for her. She is much to be pitied; her sufferings afflict me. I shall see you and her again before my death. It would have been more cruel to leave her unprepared. Do all in your power to nerve and tranquillise her. What is past cannot now be helped.'

He paused, looking hard at her, as if he had half made up his mind to say something more. But if there was a question of the kind, it was determined in favour of silence.

He dropped her hand, turned quickly, and left her.

Chapter XXIX.

DR. TORVEY'S OPINION.

When Lady Walsingham reached the head of the stairs, she met her maid, and from her learned that her sister, Lady Mardykes, was downstairs in the same room. On approaching she heard her sister Mary's voice talking with her, and found them together. Mary, finding that she could not sleep, had put on her clothes again, and come down to keep her sister company. The room looked more comfortable now. There were candles lighted, and a good fire burned in the grate; tea-things stood on a little table near the fire, and the two sisters were talking; Lady Mardykes appearing more collected, and only they two in the room.

'Have you seen him, Maud?' cried Lady Mardykes, rising and hastily approaching her the moment she entered.

'Yes, dear; and talked with him, and—'

'Well?'

'And I think very much as I did before. I think he is nervous; he says he is not ill; but he is nervous and whimsical, and as men always are when they happen to be out of sorts, very positive; and of course the only thing that can quite undeceive him is the lapse of the time he has fixed for his prediction, as it is sure to pass without any tragic result of any sort. We shall then all see alike the nature of his delusion.'

'O, Maud, if I were only sure you thought so! if I were sure you really had hopes! Tell me, Maud, for God's sake, what you really think.'

Lady Walsingham was a little disconcerted by the unexpected earnestness of this direct appeal.

'Come, darling, you must not be foolish,' she said; 'we can only talk of impressions, and we are imposed upon by the solemnity of his manner, and the fact that he evidently believes in his own delusion; every one does believe in his own delusion—there is nothing strange in that.'

'O, Maud darling, I see you are not convinced; you are only trying to comfort me. You have no hope—none, none, none;' and she covered her face with her hands, and wept again convulsively.

Lady Walsingham was silent for a moment, and then with an effort said, as she placed her hand on her sister's arm,

'You see, dear Janet, there is no use in my saying the same thing over and over again; an hour or two will show who is right. Sit down again, darling, and be like yourself. My maid told me that you had sent to the parlour for Doctor Torvey; he must not find you so. What would he think? Unless you mean to tell him of Bale's strange fancy; and a pretty story that would be to set afloat in Golden Friars. I think I hear him coming.'

So, in effect, he was. Doctor Torvey—with the florid gravity of a man who, having just swallowed a bottle of port, besides some glasses of sherry, is admitted to the presence of ladies whom he respects—entered the room, made what he called his 'leg and his compliments,' and awaited the ladies' commands.

'Sit down, Doctor Torvey,' said Lady Walsingham, who in the incapacity of her sister undertook the doing of the honours. 'My sister, Lady Mardykes, has got it into her head somehow that Sir Bale is ill. I have been speaking to him; he certainly does not look very well, but he says he is quite well. Do you think him well?—that is, we know you don't think there is anything of importance amiss—but she wishes to know whether you think him *perfectly* well.'

The Doctor cleared his voice and delivered his lecture, a little thickly at some words, upon Sir Bale's case; the result of which was that it was no case at all; and that if he would only live something more of a country gentleman's life, he would be as well as any man could desire—as well as any man, gentle or simple, in the country.

'The utmost I should think of doing for him would be, perhaps, a little quinine, nothing mo'—shurely—he is really and toory a very shoun' shtay of health.'

Lady Walsingham looked encouragingly at her sister and nodded.

'I've been shen' for, La'y Walsh—Walse—Walsing—*ham*; old

Jack Amerald—he likshe his glass o' port,' he said roguishly, 'and shuvversh accord'n'ly,' he continued, with a compassionating paddle of his right hand; 'one of thoshe aw—odd feels in his stomach; and as I have pretty well done all zhat I can man-n-'ge down here, I must be off, ye shee. Wind up from Golden Friars, and a little flutter ovv zhnow, thazh all;' and with some remarks about the extreme cold of the weather, and the severity of their night journey, and many respectful and polite parting speeches, the Doctor took his leave; and they soon heard the wheels of his gig and the tread of his horse, faint and muffled from the snow in the court-yard, and the Doctor, who had connected that melancholy and agitated household with the outer circle of humanity, was gone.

There was very little snow falling, half-a-dozen flakes now and again, and their flight across the window showed, as the Doctor had in a manner boasted, that the wind was in his face as he returned to Golden Friars. Even these desultory snow-flakes ceased, at times, altogether; and returning, as they say, 'by fits and starts,' left for long intervals the landscape, under the brilliant light of the moon, in its wide white shroud. The curtain of the great window had not been drawn. It seemed to Lady Walsingham that the moonbeams had grown more dazzling, that Snakes Island was nearer and more distinct, and the outstretched arm of the old tree looked wilder and ghastlier, like the uplifted arm of the spectator of a tragedy, who draws silently nearer as the catastrophe approaches.

Cold, dazzling, almost repulsive in this intense moonlight and white sheeting, the familiar landscape looked in the eyes of Lady Walsingham. The sisters gradually grew more and more silent, an unearthly suspense overhung them all, and Lady Mardykes rose every now and then and listened at the open door for step or voice in vain. They all were overpowered by the intenser horror that seemed gathering around them. And thus an hour or more passed.

Chapter XXX.

HUSH!

Pale and silent those three beautiful sisters sat. The horrible quietude of a suspense that had grown all but insupportable oppressed the guests of Lady Mardykes, and something like the numbness of despair had reduced her to the silence of a seeming apathy, the dreadful counterfeit of peace.

Sir Bale Mardykes on a sudden softly entered the room. Reflected from the floor near the window the white moonlight somehow gave to his fixed features the character of a smile. With a warning gesture, as he came in, he placed his finger to his lips, as if to enjoin silence; and then, having successively pressed the hands of his two sisters-in-law, he stooped over the almost fainting form of

his wife, and twice pressed her cold forehead with his lips; and so, without a word, he passed softly from the room.

Some seconds elapsed before Lady Walsingham, recovering her presence of mind, with one of the candlesticks from the table in her hand, opened the door and followed.

She saw Sir Bale mount the last stair of the broad flight visible from the hall, and candle in hand turn the corner of the massive banister, and as the light thrown from his candle showed, he continued, without hurry, to ascend the second flight.

With the irrepressible curiosity of horror she continued to follow him at a distance.

She saw him enter his own private room, and close the door, and in a moment after she thought she heard him lock it within.

Continuing to follow she placed herself noiselessly at the door of the apartment, and in breathless silence, with a throbbing heart, listened for what should pass within.

She distinctly heard Sir Bale pace the floor up and down for some time, and then, after a pause, a sound as if some one had thrown himself heavily on the bed. A silence followed, during which her sisters, who had followed more timidly, joined her. She warned them with a look and gesture to be silent.

Lady Haworth stood a little behind, her white lips moving, and her hands clasped as if in a silent agony of prayer. Lady Mardykes leaned against the massive oak door-case.

With her hand raised to her ear, and her lips parted, Lady Walsingham listened for some seconds—for a minute, two minutes, three. At last, losing heart, she seized the handle in her panic, and turned it sharply. The door was locked on the inside, but some one close to it said from within, 'Hush, hush!'

Much alarmed now, the same lady knocked violently at the door. No answer was returned.

She knocked again more violently, and shook the door with all her fragile force. It was something of horror in her countenance as she did so, that, no doubt, terrified Lady Mardykes, who with a loud and long scream sank in a swoon upon the floor.

The servants, alarmed by these sounds, were speedily in the gallery. Lady Mardykes was carried to her room, and laid upon her bed; her sister, Lady Haworth, accompanying her. In the mean time the door was forced. Sir Bale Mardykes was found stretched upon his bed.

Those who have once seen it, will not mistake the aspect of death. Here, in Sir Bale Mardykes' room, in his bed, in his clothes, is a stranger, grim and awful; in a few days to be insupportable, and to pass alone into the prison-house, and to be seen no more.

Where is Sir Bale Mardykes now, whose roof-tree and whose

place at board and bed will know him no more? Here lies a chap-fallen, fish-eyed image, chilling already into clay, and stiffening in every joint.

There is a marble monument in the pretty church of Golden Friars. It stands at the left side of what antiquarians call 'the high altar.' Two pillars at each end support an arch with several armorial bearings on as many shields sculptured above. Beneath, on a marble flooring raised some six feet, with a cornice round, lies Sir Bale Mardykes, of Mardykes Hall, ninth Baronet of that ancient family, chiseled in marble with knee-breeches and buckled-shoes, and *ailles de pigeon*, and single-breasted coat and long waistcoat, ruffles and sword, such as gentlemen wore about the year 1770, and bearing a strong resemblance to the features of the second Charles. On the broad marble which forms the background is inscribed an epitaph, which has perpetuated to our times the estimate formed by his 'inconsolable widow,' the Dowager Lady Mardykes, of the virtues and accomplishments of her deceased lord.

Lady Walsingham would have qualified two or three of the more highly-coloured hyperboles, at which the Golden Friars of those days sniffed and tittered. They don't signify now; there is no contemporary left to laugh or whisper. And if there be not much that is true in the letter of that inscription, it at least perpetuates something that is true—that wonderful glorification of partisanship, the affection of an idolising wife.

Lady Mardykes, a few days after the funeral, left Mardykes Hall for ever. She lived a great deal with her sister, Lady Walsingham; and died, as a line cut at the foot of Sir Bale Mardykes' epitaph records, in the year 1790; her remains being laid beside those of her beloved husband in Golden Friars.

The estates had come to Sir Bale Mardykes free of entail. He had been pottering over a will, but it was never completed, nor even quite planned; and after much doubt and scrutiny, it was at last ascertained that, in default of a will and of issue, a clause in the marriage-settlement gave the entire estates to the Dowager Lady Mardykes.

By her will she bequeathed the estates to 'her cousin, also a kinsman of the late Sir Bale Mardykes her husband,' William Feltram, on condition of his assuming the name and arms of Mardykes, the arms of Feltram being quartered in the shield.

Thus was óddly fulfilled the prediction which Philip Feltram had repeated, that the estates of Mardykes were to pass into the hands of a Feltram.

About the year 1795 the baronetage was revived, and William Feltram enjoyed the title for fifteen years, as Sir William Mardykes.

THE GHOST AT LABURNUM VILLA

THERE can be no doubt that Mr. Paul Withers is constitutionally nervous. Mrs. Withers says so; and as a man's wife ought to know something about his weak points, the fact may be considered indisputable. Not that Withers himself seeks to conceal or deny this peculiarity; on the contrary, he makes rather a parade of it; just as some people do with their cynicism, their bad temper, or any other feature which they think gives them distinctiveness of character. Withers, being an author, is in the habit of declaring that he considers his nervousness an advantage; but when he tries to define this position, he gets too misty to follow very closely. Mrs. W., it need scarcely be said, takes the opposite view, and invariably clinches the discussion by declaring, that if Paul hadn't been so absurdly nervous he would never have seen the ghost at Laburnum Villa. As Paul believes devoutly in the one spectral experience of his life, he does not find the illustration convincing; but out of respect for his wife's strength of scepticism, changes the subject.

Was there a ghost at Laburnum Villa, or was it merely a creation of Withers' over-excited brain? Our readers shall judge for themselves.

The 'neat detached villa-residence' in question was situated in a semi-rural suburb of London. The agent's advertisement, just quoted, farther described it as being 'elegantly furnished,' and 'within five minutes of a railway-station.' If anything more antagonistic to the supernatural than this can be imagined, we shall be glad to hear of it. The advertisement attracted the attention of Mrs. Withers while seated at breakfast with her family in a remote Welsh watering-place; and in the evening of the same day, just as the heavy twilight of a dull September was changing into night, Withers stood at the gate of Laburnum Villa with a small travelling-bag in his hand, and the key of that residence in his pocket.

It had been a miserable day. In the first place, his breakfast had been spoiled by the 'impetuosity' of Mrs. Withers. That worthy lady had been for some time bringing a legitimate pressure to bear to secure a month or two's stay in London. When she saw the advertisement, she became immediately and completely possessed by the idea that the neighbourhood in question combined every advantage attainable in this necessarily imperfect state of existence. To resolve and act being with her one and the same impulse, she began at once to pack Withers' travelling-bag in spite of his almost

pathetic remonstrances. Finding pathos of no use he tried argument, and from that drifted into what *he* called 'firmness' and Mrs. W. 'stupidity.' At this point, when there was just ten minutes to catch the mail-train from Holyhead, Mrs. W. asked in a tone of assumed calmness, if he intended to go to London in his slippers. His only reply was to put on his boots with a gloomy frown, snatch up his bag, and depart without even a 'good-morning.' That circumstance, however, did not in the least affect the appetite with which Mrs. Withers continued her interrupted breakfast. Withers meantime speeding Londonwards, and suffering as only nervous men can suffer from the irritating strain of an express journey, was brooding over a terrible scheme of vengeance. He would take the house —O yes, *he* would take it at any risk; if it was steaming with damp, infested with the most formidable rats, overrun with specimens of natural history, with a leaky cistern and defective drains, broken-windowed, dilapidated, ay, even roofless! 'His great revenge had stomach for them all!' But he never for a moment contemplated the possibility of its being 'haunted.'

Arrived in London, shattered in body and mind, but with his gloomy purpose strong upon him, he enlisted the obstructiveness of a maddening cabman to place as many difficulties as possible in the way of his finding the house-agent. After this slave of the rank had shut him in a rickety and strong-smelling box on wheels, he displayed an amount of obtuseness about the required address that nearly made Withers jump through the window with rage. Then, when he had acquired some dim notion of where his fare wanted to go, he proceeded with great deliberation in an entirely wrong direction. After two or three false starts of this sort, and the consequent dissipation of a good deal of valuable time, the right office was found at last; and the agent himself discovered in the act of closing his labours for the day, in order to retire to the 'bosom of his family.' This is never a good time to meet a man who hates doing things in a hurry. Therefore Withers had expended some energy against the impassible composure of Mr. Leese in vain, until he happened to mention the name of the house he wished to occupy. The words 'Laburnum Villa' seemed to act like a spell; and in ten minutes more Withers found himself in possession of the key of that 'neat detached villa-residence.' Confiding himself once more to the care of cabby, he soon forgot the temporary gleam of elation produced by this small success in gloomy reflections on the probability of his being obliged to spend the night wandering aimlessly about the suburbs in that strong-smelling cab. Then he remembered a newspaper controversy about conveying hospital-patients in public vehicles. Unpleasant impressions began to crowd upon him, and he was on the point of stopping the cab and jumping out, when it was pulled-up with a violent jerk, and he was informed that he was 'there.'

When he found himself alone in a front garden of tolerable size, he began to find the situation singular. Then a lurking suspicion that it might prove disagreeable obtruded itself. He glanced up at the front of the house, which was of the usual commonplace bow-windowed pattern, and was struck by the fact that there was no appearance of occupation. To resolve this doubt at once he knocked at the door. The sound seemed to raise a dozen melancholy echoes in the neighbourhood; but after these had died away in a low-spirited style, there was no response from the interior of Laburnum Villa. At this point a servant, in full evening dress of light cotton print, fluttered across from one of the nearest villas for the purpose of informing him that, 'Please, sir, no one lives in that 'ouse.'

'No one! Is it left to take care of itself?'

'O no, sir. There's a person—leastways an old woman—comes in the daytime, but she don't live there regular. No one has lived there regular since Miss Steel died.'

After imparting these agreeable facts, the servant fluttered genteelly away again, leaving Withers standing on the door-step with an awkward consciousness that, from the drawing-room window of the nearest villa, eyes were bent upon him through the laths of the venetians. It would be absurd to retreat. He took the key from his pocket and entered.

Falling over a pail, happily empty, which had been carelessly left in the little hall, did not tend to put him in a good temper, or to decrease the nervousness that had been growing upon him all day. He sat down on the pail, rubbed his shins, and tried to realise the situation. Alone in a strange house, with nothing to eat, and with that faint sickness upon him which comes of the fatigue and semi-starvation of express travelling. Obviously the thing to do was to look for the kitchen. There might be something to eat: at any rate the chance was worth trying. Fortunately the kitchen was not far off, on the ground-floor, and he groped his way there without much difficulty. Here he was rejoiced by discovering the remains of a good fire, and received a momentary shock from a woman's dress, which was hanging from a hook in a way suggestive, in the dim light from the grate, of the person—'leastways the old woman'—having made a violent end of herself. A box of matches was the next fortunate discovery made by Withers, who began to feel himself a sort of Crusoe; but after burning two or three in a vain attempt to light the gas, he was forced to the unpleasant conclusion that it was either turned off at the meter, or 'cut off' by the gas company. Deferring farther experiments in this direction for the present, he began, with the aid of a candle, to search for provisions. The prosecution of this laudable object naturally took him into the pantry. He was standing here, holding the candle above his head, and peering anxiously about the shelves, when he heard

close to him, as it seemed, the shrill treble shout in which boyhood proclaims its eternal war with mankind. 'Yah! yah! the post!' the cry sounded like. What did they mean by 'post'? Withers opened the window a little way, and listened more intently. The juvenile destroyers of peace were some distance across the field by this time, so he couldn't be sure whether his ears deceived him or not; but he certainly thought he heard 'Yah! yah! the ghost!' It was very absurd, of course; but still Withers felt 'queer' as he closed the window again and continued his search. He was rewarded by a magnificent 'find'—a half-consumed meat-pie in prime condition, doubtless the personal property of the 'person' before mentioned. It was evident that *she*, at least, was no ghost, which was so far satisfactory. With the help of the brandy in his travelling-flask, Withers made a hearty supper off the meat-pie; and, strange to say, never bestowed a thought on the probability of its 'disagreeing' with him—a subject upon which, on ordinary occasions, he was wont to be discreetly but pathetically eloquent.

'Now for the meter,' thought Withers, after finishing supper by the light of his solitary candle. He had always entertained rather a high opinion of himself, had Withers, in a modest self-contained way; but now, under the combined influence of meat-pie, brandy, and a pipe of cavendish, he began to think he had done himself scanty justice. 'Strange,' he mused over his pipe, 'how a novel situation, strange conditions, bring out what is self-reliant in a man. How soon a fellow with any stuff in him grasps and subdues unfamiliar surroundings! The curled and scented military darling of drawing-rooms becomes a hero in war and a Spartan in the camp. The refined son of metropolitan civilisation, the polished cynic of club smoking-rooms, goes to the diggings, and straightway becomes "hail fellow well met" with navvies, and a thoroughgoing advocate of Lynch law.' And then Withers began to think pleasantly of his own fertility of resource, though he had, after all, only gone into an unoccupied house, and consumed another person's provisions. Rousing himself from such meditations with a gentle melancholy upon him, as became a person never destined to be thoroughly appreciated, he went to look for the meter. He found the place where the meter *had* been, but that was all. This being an emergency to which his resources were by no means equal, he began to doubt the absolute sufficiency of self-reliance under all circumstances. At any rate, no tolerably efficient substitute for the missing meter suggested itself to him, so he determined to distinguish himself in another unfamiliar direction. Returning upstairs, he occupied an hour or so very pleasantly, blacking his face and hands to an impossible extent, in the attempt to light a fire in the dining-room. He had chosen the dining-room to pass the night in in preference to running the risk of damp beds, because it was

compact, not to say diminutive, in its proportions, and therefore more easily warmed and lighted by a fire and a couple of candles. Here, then, after the completion of his arrangements, he will be left to continue the story in his own words.

I do not know what the general experience in such cases may be, but I never can feel on thoroughly good terms with other people's furniture; there is a sense of antagonism which I find it impossible to subdue. Even while lounging in the very comfortable easy-chair in the dining-room of Laburnum Villa, I felt as strongly as possible that I was being seated under protest. The companion easy-chair balancing mine on the opposite side of the fire-place had, to my sensitive mind, a distinctly disparaging expression in its arms, and a shrug, as of contempt, in its well-stuffed back. A fiercely-gilt warrior, who was careering at a terrible rate on the top of a clock (run down and silent) decorating the mantelpiece, seemed to point his weapon at me in an openly threatening manner, and challenge me to mortal combat. Even the engravings on the walls rejected me as an alien. 'Shakespeare and his Contemporaries' were evidently engaged in discussing me in an unfavourable spirit; and Frith's 'Merrymakers' ignored me so completely that I ought to have sunk terribly in my own esteem. There was a portrait in oil, too, of a gentleman, which it was impossible to escape, because it hung opposite the chimney-glass; so that whenever I raised my head, I caught it apparently looking at me over the mantelpiece with an unmistakable expression of indignant surprise. I could almost hear it saying in an injured tone, 'What the deuce is that fellow doing in my dining-room!'

This state of feeling was becoming intensified to a most disagreeable pitch, when a framed photograph 'caught my eye'—if I may be permitted to use the phrase—and gave a new turn to my thoughts. It was a full-length of a young lady with one of the most singular faces I ever saw in my life; not a pleasant face by any means, but full of decided character, though the mouth and chin were weak without being feminine. I thought, with something like a shudder of repugnance, that Elsie Venner—that curious creature with the reptile taint in her blood—must have looked like this girl, who seemed to have nothing of girlhood about her but its physical weakness. The small colourless face, with its retreating chin, unsmiling mouth, and slightly prominent nose, its sloping narrow forehead and brilliant black eyes, had such a repellent unsympathetic character, that it created the most disagreeable impressions. I returned to my seat, from which I had risen to examine the portrait; but I found it impossible to shake-off the feeling it had produced. It was as repugnant to me as if it had been some noxious thing endowed with a sluggish vitality which found expression in the glittering eyes alone: they seemed to hold me with a triumphant consciousness of their power,

though they were looking in another direction, out of the picture, but not at the spectator. I got up under an uncontrollable impulse, and turned the face to the wall. In doing so, I discovered that on the back of the frame there was pasted one of those 'funeral cards' which some people are in the habit of sending to their friends on the occasion of a death in the family. That there might be no mistake as to the identity of the 'Laura Steel' here mentioned, a miniature photograph was affixed at the top of the card. So Laura Steel was the name of the unprepossessing young lady, and she was dead. All the nameless fascination went out of those singular orbs at the thought, and I felt something like remorse for my fancies about her.

I ought to have begun to feel fatigued by this time; but though I lay back as comfortably as possible in the easy-chair, put my feet on the fender, and stared at the fire, no drooping of the eyelids hinted at an approaching doze. It was no use trying to persuade myself that I wanted to take 'forty winks.' The fact was not to be disguised that I was most distressingly wakeful, restless, and listening; distinctly *listening*, for I caught myself in the act. It was very plain that nature was revenging itself for my ill-spent day in the abnormal activity of my nervous system. I got up, and going to a book-case in a recess, took down a volume at random. It proved to be a collection of German plays of the sanguinary school: Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, Schiller's *Robbers*, and others of the same type. This proved a fortunate speculation; and I soon found myself going through the most harrowing and bloodthirsty scenes with that luxurious sense of suspended attention which is the first phase of an inevitable doze. Emilia was about to stab herself, and I was just nodding my admiration of her courage and virtue, when suddenly I started up broad awake, and let the book fall. I glanced almost involuntarily at the photograph, and saw, or fancied I saw, in the averted glittering eyes the same indefinable expression revived that had struck me so unpleasantly at first. What was it that had startled me? I did not know. Still less could I explain the intensity of a new sensation, possessing me completely, which seemed to hold all my being in the one act of *listening*.

A house does not need to be old and dilapidated in order to supply plenty of mysterious noises; indeed, new houses are more prolific in this respect than old ones. I heard any quantity of the usual creaking, straining, and flapping in Laburnum Villa, but nothing to which I felt inclined to give any special significance. After a few minutes, therefore, the acute tension of my nerves began to relax, and I turned once more to my book. Here I met with a disappointment; for I soon became sensible that the horrors of the German dramatist had lost their soporific effect, and, inexplicably enough, were acting as an irritant. I was reading with sharpened senses, and realising what I read. It was another disagreeable surprise to find that the late

Miss Steel—or, at least, my idea of her—was getting involved in the scenes, identifying herself with the sanguinary interest as a pervading evil influence. The criminal personages seemed to gleam at me from the page with the snake-like brilliancy of her eyes, and the malignant bitterness of the wicked speeches to come from the same lax unsmiling lips. I threw down the book impatiently, and began to trim the candles; but though I smiled while doing so at the idea of being reduced to candles in this age of gas, I could not help noticing that my hands trembled violently. I was so awkward about my work that I nearly extinguished the light. I poked the fire into a blaze, and set myself resolutely to think.

Some considerable time passed in a vain attempt to resume the mastery of myself; but I gave up the struggle at last, and resigned myself passively to wait and listen. I was sensible of no alarm, or even anxiety; I was simply held down, physically and mentally, and kept quiet. An imperious expectation of something, I did not know what, absorbed every sense and faculty of my being. How long I half sat, half lay thus, I do not know. Nature seemed to stand still; there was no time, and everything came to a breathless pause.

Then over this dead peace there came stealing a subtle infection of terror. The air was charged with it as with a plague. This horror gathered and thickened, like the darkness before a storm, until it became a palpable oppression. My body was paralysed; only my soul struggled feebly against the threatenings of madness or death.

It came at last. With my quickened senses, I could hear the stir in the air that heralded its approach, as if the atmosphere of Nature recoiled from the awful thing. It was in the room, and I recognised the figure at once, though the face was turned from me: the girl of the portrait with the snake-like eyes. I felt that if those eyes met mine, I should go mad; and yet I was powerless to look away, or move, or cry out. My heart stood still, and life was slipping away from my paralysed grasp. It was kneeling before the drawers in the lower part of the book-case, and appeared to be searching anxiously in one of them. Suddenly it recoiled, and threw its arms wildly above its head. It arose swiftly, and in the instant it stood erect was confronted by another figure, that of an old man. It seemed to read a sentence of condemnation in the face of this second comer, for it sank into a kneeling position, and clasped the other despairingly by the knees. There were savagely-rapid blows rained upon the face of the petitioner, upturned in an agony of entreaty, and a furious thrusting away. With a long wailing scream, it rolled writhing almost at my feet, and the awful eyes glared full into mine. Merciful oblivion came upon me, and I fell into a death-like unconsciousness.

When I revived, it was to find myself in a state of physical prostration as great as if I had just been recovering from a severe illness. The nervous restlessness from which I had suffered in the early part of the night had completely disappeared. It seemed that I had exhausted my powers of endurance, and my capacity for receiving violent mental impressions. I could only lie still and try, in a feeble groping way, to renew my hold upon the familiar every-day life which had become so distant and indistinct. I endeavoured to remember the incidents that had preceded my arrival at the villa; but I could only do so in a confused wandering style, without sequence or coherency. Mr. Leese the house-agent got mixed up with the cabman, and both receded into some indefinite past, the duration of which it was impossible to calculate. And all the time I was thus trying to rearrange the history of the day, I was sensible of a shadowy horror in the background of my thoughts, which I knew, evade it as I might, I should be obliged to face by and by. That dreadful remembrance, I was conscious, would force itself upon me with returning physical strength, without any effort of mine to rouse it. Let it sleep now, like a coiled serpent; there were hours enough of depression in store in the future to be darkened by its malignant influence. Should I ever forget it? I could not help asking myself, even in my almost imbecile state of prostration. Would it be always, as it was now, a lurking horror, crouching for a spring when its victim was most helpless?

I must have sat for a long time in this state of mental suspension; for when I gained energy enough to take active note of external things, I found the candles burnt out, and the fire a black mass, with some faint red sparks here and there. My first act of vitality was to seize the brandy-bottle, and take a draught of raw spirit such as would have completely stupefied me under ordinary circumstances. As it was, it produced such an immediate effect, in my weak state, that I could just stagger to the sofa, where I fell into a heavy and dreamless sleep.

It was broad daylight when I wakened again, and found a singular-looking old woman standing by the side of my improvised couch. We stared at each other, with much bewilderment on my side, and apparently much solemn relish on hers, for several minutes. She was the first to break the awkward silence, by remarking in a husky tone, 'Lor' a-mussy!' Then I sat up, and became aware that I had a very active collection of steam-hammers at work in my head. This indisposed me for conversation, especially with an old woman who seemed to breathe gin, and I lay down again. She wheezed interrogatively, and did not appear to have any intention of going away. I turned towards her, and she repeated the exclamation or observation before quoted. 'What do you want?' I asked at last, feeling under an obligation to say something. This simple

question confused her so much, that she could only wheeze louder than ever, and rub her hands aimlessly with a very dirty duster. 'I suppose you are the person who takes care of the house?' I added, with the benevolent design of assisting her comprehension. 'Yes, sir; Mrs. Panting, sir, as Mr. Leese allus 'as engaged, me bein', as 'e says, trustworthy, with the 'ighest of characters, as was wrote out most beautiful by Mr. Leese's young man; an' I 'ope, sir, if you've took the 'ouse, as your good lady'll keep me on, sir, bein' easy satisfied, with a pore appetite, through bein' a widow, sir, with a small fambly, as allus did the charin' and washin' for pore Mr. Steel, and giv' the 'ighest satisfaction.' I had collapsed at first, under this sudden shower-bath of information; but the name of Steel roused me, and I determined to extract what information Mrs. Panting possessed about the family. She possessed a great deal, as it proved, and no doubt invented whatever was necessary to fill-up the gaps in her knowledge; but in its broad outlines the story was probable enough.

Miss Steel's was one of those histories, commonplace in appearance to the outside spectator, the external features of which may be summed-up in a few lines, while an internal analysis would fill volumes. Mrs. Panting's amplified, decorated, and very discursive history may be told in a few words. Laura Steel had conceived a violent and unreasoning passion for a man who was utterly and hopelessly unworthy of the slightest public notice from any woman who valued her reputation. There had been a clandestine correspondence, and a regular series of stolen meetings, before her father discovered the state of affairs. Then came a sickening struggle for supremacy between the father and daughter: she bold, defiant, and reckless; he mad with passionate rage and the bare possibility of social disgrace. There was a short and deceitful truce, but it was only the sullen calm that precedes the fury of the storm. It came to a sudden end one day, for he had been searching among her papers during her absence, and found a certificate of marriage dated about seven months before. There was a terrible scene when she returned home at night; a scene which even imaginative Mrs. Panting trembled at the mere recollection of. He cast his daughter off with such frightful imprecations as raving demons might have uttered, and swore a horrible oath of hatred even beyond the grave. A few days after, she died in giving birth to a still-born child. The terrible passion of the old man was too much for his enfeebled frame; and he too succumbed soon after to an attack of paralysis, which, though it deprived him of speech, could not quench the hatred that burned in his eyes to the last.

When Mrs. Panting had finished her story, she exhibited as corroborative evidence a manuscript volume, much burned on the outside, which she had picked up from under the grate the morning

after the tragedy. As she could not read, however, she had no idea how irresistible that corroboration was. It was Miss Steel's diary, or at any rate all that was left of it. A more appalling production, for a woman's hand, I never met before, and devoutly hope never to meet again.

How is it that the worst women, if they have the power of expression, are always the most eager to make a morbid analysis of their wickedness on paper? Let philosophers answer, if they can. Miss Steel's diary was not one of incident; about her personal surroundings she wrote little beyond the facts that her mother had died while she was an infant, and that she had never loved her father. The 'sentiment,' as she considered it, of filial affection was the subject of her most caustic sarcasms. Her father, on the other hand, had reciprocated her indifference most thoroughly, and thus she had grown in a state of complete isolation. An intelligence so acute and observant that it only wanted a touch of human sympathy to produce the fruits of genius, had been perverted by indiscriminate and unwholesome reading into a field for the growth of the wildest and most unhealthy fancies. No question was too high, or too low, or too sacred for the effrontery of her amazing speculations. Themes that mankind have been accustomed to approach with reverent awe were treated with revolting flippancy, as almost unworthy of serious thought. But it was when she had passed under the dominion of a new passion that all the distorted strength of her character was put forth. It was simply raving, with few intervals of lucidity; and I was compelled to give up the task of reading it from sheer inability to bear the painful feeling of mental irritation it produced. I need only add, that I felt it a duty to superintend carefully the process of reducing it by fire to a harmless pile of feathery ashes.

Human nature, even nervous human nature, will bear a great deal, we know; and I must have got over the effects of my night's experience to some extent when I could feel a sort of grim satisfaction in despatching the following telegram to Mrs. Withers at Llanfairfechan: 'Don't come. Laburnum Villa won't do.'

THE HAUNTED ROCK

BY CHARLES F. F. WOODS

Some years ago, through the interest of a relation, I received the appointment of a lighthouse-keeper. I did not much care about the work, as I dreaded its dulness; but I was young and beginning the world, and could not afford to be nice in my selection of an occupation.

The remarks of my friends, when they heard of my new career, were certainly not calculated to reassure me. Most of my companions were in one way or the other connected with the sea, and all the congratulations I got upon my advancement in life were ominous shakes of the head, and muttered remarks as to there being 'queer tales about them lighthouse chaps;' the concluding practical advice being generally, 'I wouldn't take it, if I was you, Tom.'

This was certainly rather calculated to throw a damper upon my new employ; but, as I argued with myself, if I did not take it, I had nothing better to look to, and I would not throw myself upon my friends; so, determined to make the best I could of the matter, I went down to Blackwall to be instructed in my new duties. It was not long before I made myself sufficiently acquainted with them as to be *au fait* at the management of the lamps and apparatus; and was at length pronounced fit to undertake the duties of supernumerary lighthouse-keeper.

These supernumeraries have to hold themselves in readiness to proceed to any part of the coast where they may be required to relieve others who, from sickness or other causes, are removed from their posts. A few mornings after my instruction was completed, I received a sudden intimation that I was required to proceed to take charge of a lighthouse on the coast of Wales. On making inquiries about the new charge to which I was posted, all I could learn was, that the legitimate keeper had deserted his employ some months before, and had not since been heard of; that his place had been temporarily filled-up by a man from a neighbouring village, who it was hoped would have continued in it; but that he had recently insisted upon giving up his berth, alleging as an excuse that the dulness of the life was more than he could bear. With this information (which was all the people at head-quarters either could or would give me), I was forced to be content, and started off for Wales that very afternoon, arriving at the scene of my future labours on the next day. At the first glance, the prospect was not

alluring. It was at the end of October, on one of those dull, boisterous, dank days on which all Nature seems mourning the brightness of the summer that's past, and lamenting the rigour of the winter to ensue. The wind came sometimes in strong chill puffs, that seemed to send the cold to one's very bones; sometimes in soft sighs that moaned dismally through the half-barren trees, sending the leaves slowly fluttering from the branches to rot upon the oozy ground. The desolation of the scene seemed even to have infected the few cottages by which I was surrounded, and in which the only signs of life appeared to be clouds of steam (evidently from washing) which came through the open doors; while a few slatternly women went in and out on pattens, sometimes chiding the groups of children that clustered on the threshold, greedily eyeing the pools of mud and water beyond.

Even had I wished to possess it, I saw that there was little information to be got there; and as I was tired with my journey and anxious to be out of the cold as soon as possible, I put what effects I had into a boat (which I hired with some little difficulty), and set off for the lighthouse, which was built upon a rock at some distance from the land. On the way thither I thought that the boatmen eyed me somewhat curiously, and were not very talkative, simply hailing my volunteered information that I was the new keeper with an 'Ah!' and a significant glance at each other. I did not notice this much, however, as I was occupied with my own thoughts, speculating how I should pass my time in the grim building I was approaching, round which the eager waves leapt, as if anxious to engulf it, curling back with a sullen roar at their defeat. On my arrival I was received by the man whom I was to relieve with evident satisfaction. He was a gaunt beetle-browed Welshman; and I could not help noticing the haggard anxious look his face wore. Almost the moment I set foot in the building he called out to the boatmen who had brought me to 'wait, as he wouldn't take long setting his new mate to rights with the place, and they could take him on shore.' This, however, I combated stoutly, and insisted on his at least keeping me company the first night, as I did not know how the lights worked: to this, after much demur, he consented, with evident reluctance, and the boat went back.

My new abode consisted merely of the 'lantern,' in which the lights burned, and, beneath, the watch-room, furnished with a bed, chair, and table, and such culinary and domestic necessaries as the keeper required. A flight of stairs led to the door by which the building was entered, and a lower flight seemed to lead to cellars or recesses of some sort; my companion did not, however, show me these, as he said they were never used, and it wasn't worth while going down in the cold. The evening drew quickly on; and as the autumn twilight grew darkling over the waters, the sea and wind

both seemed to rise, and the crash of the breakers as they leaped fiercely up the rock, and the whistling of the gale, were anything but agreeable adjuncts to a residence desolate enough in itself.

For the first hour or two of the evening I was busily enough employed in learning how the lamps were trimmed, lighted, &c., and in reading the regulations by which the keeper was to be guided. When I had, as I thought, made myself sufficiently acquainted with the routine of the life that was before me, I sat down with my quondam companion (whose name was Morgan); and as we smoked our pipes by the fire, tried to gather from him the particulars of the late keeper's disappearance, and why he himself was giving up the situation. Morgan, however, was anything but communicative; he said he knew very little about his predecessor; he was a sulky gloomy sort of chap, who lived here with a very pretty wife, and was said to drink hard at times (but that he didn't know about). One night the lamps were not lighted; and when the coastguard put-off to see what was amiss, the lighthouse was found deserted, and as a good many metal articles of value were missing, it was supposed that the keeper and his wife had stolen them and made off. As for himself, he had lived there better than three months, but it was so mortal dull, he couldn't stand it any longer. This was all I could get from my new friend, and even this was only got out of him by close questioning.

As the night wore on, I noticed that Morgan seemed to grow fidgety and uneasy, and applied himself, rather more than I thought the authorities would have approved of, to a case-bottle of spirits on the table. It seemed to have no effect on him, however; and he at length volunteered to look after the lights that night, so that I might have a good rest after my journey. I was too tired to gainsay this, and in spite of an uneasy feeling, which I could not account for even to myself, soon fell into a troubled sleep. Whether it was the novelty of my situation or not, I hardly know, but during the first portion of the night I scarcely slept half an hour consecutively; and when I awoke, hearing the never-ceasing roar of the waves, contrasting with the deep silence within the building, I always, in spite of myself, began wondering why the last keeper had left, what sort of a woman his wife was, and whether he had really stolen the missing things. These speculations seemed so absurd, that I tried hard to dismiss them, but without success; and it was only as the dawn was breaking that I fell into a deep unbroken slumber, from which I did not wake till the morning was far advanced.

When I arose, I found it was a bright fresh morning, the gale having died away to a soft south-west wind. As I stood by one of the open windows, how different the scene appeared to the gloom of yesterday! Where the sunlight fell upon the still heaving billows it turned them, now to masses of sheeny opal, now into cascades of

diamonds, as the spray was thrown high into the air. In the distance, like snowy sea-birds, appeared the white sails of the fishing-craft; and as the fresh wind cooled my fevered cheek, my spirits rose wonderfully, and I anticipated almost with delight the calm hours I might spend here with my books, surrounded by the ever-changing beauty of the ocean. Morgan now came down from the 'lantern,' and pointed to the breakfast he had got for me; his own, he said, had been finished long since, and as soon as I was ready he would go on shore. Although I could not help being surprised at the almost nervous haste the man displayed to be off, I now had nothing to urge against it. I therefore finished my repast as expeditiously as I could; and having lowered the boat attached to the lighthouse, we pulled on shore almost in silence. When within about half a mile of the land, Morgan, who had been thinking deeply, suddenly stopped pulling, and very abruptly asked me if I had any arms in the lighthouse. Somewhat startled at the question, I replied that I had a revolver, but it was unloaded, as I didn't see how I could require it. 'Better load it,' was the hurried answer; 'it's lonesome at times out yonder, and you'll feel more comfortable if you've something by you as you can trust to.' We were close to the land now, and in a minute or two my companion sprang ashore, and hurriedly wishing me good-bye, strode away through the trees, and was soon lost to sight. I knew no one in the little village; so thought I would go up to the coastguard station, as I had been desired to put myself under the orders of the officer in charge. There was no one there, at the time I arrived, but an old man-of-war's-man, to whom, however, I duly reported myself, and got him to give me some information as to where to get my provisions, &c. This he very good-naturedly did; and while going down to the village, I questioned him about the late keeper's desertion, which somehow or other always seemed strangely to interest me. My new friend, however, could tell me no more than Morgan had, viz. that the man and his wife were supposed to have stolen the articles that were missing, and decamped. I spent a good bit of the afternoon in making my little purchases, and returned to the lighthouse about four o'clock, in order to be in time to light the lamps before the approach of dusk. After the boat was securely fastened up, and the door locked and barred, I must confess that a dull sense of loneliness fell upon me. I shook it off, however, and busied myself with my work; and what with trimming the lights, and preparing and discussing my evening meal, I got through the time pretty well till eight o'clock, when I went up into the lantern to see that all was working correctly, and then sat down to commence my first night's watch, alone in the midst of the waters.

All anticipated evils seem smaller when really near. I had all along so much dreaded the dulness of my night-watchings, that now

I had really commenced one of them, I was agreeably disappointed at finding it much more endurable than I had expected. There was certainly an oppressive silence reigning through the building, and the monotonous boom of the waves dashing against the rock was not inspiriting; but I had letters to write home, plenty of books to read, and my lights to visit every hour; so that altogether the night passed quickly enough away; and when the dawn broke, I went to bed with the hopeful exclamation that 'it wasn't so bad, after all.' The following day was Saturday, and I determined to devote it to putting my room in order. I did not rise till nearly two o'clock, and spent the remainder of the afternoon in arranging my books, clothes, &c. As the evening drew on, I trimmed and lighted my lamps, and then read till nearly nine. About this time I began to find a difficulty in confining my attention to my book. In spite of myself, my thoughts kept wandering to their old theme —the late keeper's desertion of his post, and what sort of a life he had led in the room in which I was sitting, to induce him to disappear so mysteriously. I roused myself, by a strong effort of will, from these profitless speculations, and went to the window to see what sort of a night it was. There was no moon, and as far as the eye could reach, nothing was visible but the black heaving waves purposelessly swaying to and fro, sometimes tinged by a faint streak of phosphorescent light, as the white ridge in which they culminated rippled slowly away. It seemed very lonely to be built up there in that waste of waters, and a sort of cold chill seemed to settle on my heart as I began to revolve all sorts of improbable contingencies, such as having a fit, or the lighthouse taking fire. Altogether, I felt myself gradually getting into such a state of nervous excitement, that I could hardly bear my own thoughts. So, determined, if possible, to break the spell that seemed creeping over me, I mixed a stiff glass of grog, and sat down with my pipe by the fire. There was nothing to disturb my thoughts, and I sat conjuring up all sorts of home scenes, listening absently to the half-minute click of the lights as they revolved above, the only sound that broke the dead silence surrounding me. The clock had just struck eleven, and I was thinking of visiting my lights, when suddenly a confused noise of struggling and curses, intermingled with the sound of heavy blows, arose from beneath me. I sprang from my chair, my first impression being that thieves had broken into the lighthouse. While I stood listening, rapid steps ascended the stair; and as I turned to seize the poker as the nearest weapon available, the door flew violently open, and to my intense horror, the sound of oaths and struggling commenced close by me, but not a thing which *could cause it was visible!* The noise barely lasted a minute, lifetime as it seemed to me, and appeared again to descend the stair. For a moment all was still, and I was beginning to try and persuade myself that I had

been the victim of some horrible hallucination, when a wild shrill scream, the agony of which haunts me still, rang through the silent building, and a woman's voice exclaimed, 'George, George! for God's sake don't murder me!' A dull thud, as of some heavy substance falling to the ground, a low gurgling noise, and all was still.

Palsied with horror, I stood leaning on the chair to which I had clung for support, every nerve strained in agonised expectation of a renewal of the disturbance; but minute after minute went by, marked by the sound of the revolving lights, and all remained as still as the grave. Little by little I recovered power over my thoughts, and sat down, trying to account for the scene I had just gone through. Could any joke have been played on me? That hardly seemed possible, for I had barred and locked the door myself, and the key still hung beside me. I could scarcely bring myself to believe it was anything supernatural, for I had been all my life a sceptic as to such things; but how to account for the scuffling in the room close by me? I at length became more emboldened by the perfect quiet that reigned, and got out my revolver and loaded it carefully, and summoning up all the resolution I possessed, determined to go down and examine the cellars where the noises had apparently begun and ended. Taking a closed lantern in one hand and my revolver in the other, I cautiously descended the stair, looking around and behind me, I must confess, with fear and trembling. Nothing extraordinary was, however, visible; the door was barred and fastened as I had left it, and all the things that lay about were in precisely the same positions as when I had seen them last. Not a sound was to be heard but the dash of the waves, which broke upon the walls around and above me now. I was somewhat reassured by finding everything as I had left it on coming in; but as I prepared to descend the lower winding stair leading to the cellars, I felt a smothered sensation upon my chest, and my heart beat so loud that it would have been audible to any one standing near. Down the narrow stair I went cautiously, the air becoming colder at every step, while the little light that came from the lamp I carried showed that the walls were dank with moisture, and covered with fungoid growths. When I arrived at the bottom, I found myself opposite a strongly-built door, not apparently fastened. The clammy sweat rolled down my face, and it was some minutes before I could summon up enough courage to thrust the door open with my foot. Holding the lantern forward, but almost dreading to see what its light might reveal, I found that two or three steps led down to a large cellar, made apparently in the rock itself. The walls, like those surrounding the stair, were dripping with moisture, and a peculiar earthy sickly odour seemed to taint the air; but, with the exception of some billets of wood, a chopper, and a large hammer thrown into a corner, the place was perfectly empty. I satisfied myself that there was no

outlet to it; and barring the door as best I could, returned to the watch-room slightly relieved in mind, but more puzzled than ever to account for the scene I had gone through an hour before. I passed the remainder of the night in the 'lantern;' and may no one ever know such wretched hours as dragged their weary length along till dawn!

Out of the chaos of thoughts that went whirling through my brain, I determined that, as soon as daybreak released me from my watch, I would instantly go on shore and inform the officer of the coastguard of the whole affair. At about eight o'clock I securely fastened up the place, lowered the boat, and taking advantage of the light wind, sailed on shore, went straight up to the coastguard station, and asked to see the officer. The men gathered, I think, from my haggard looks and flurried manner, that I had something of importance to communicate; and one of them took me at once to the officer's cottage, which was not far distant.

Mr. Thomson, who commanded the coastguard, was a man of about thirty-three years of age. He had been a lieutenant in the navy, and was now on half-pay. Being without private means, and seeing no immediate prospect of active employment, he had petitioned and petitioned the Admiralty until they had given him his present appointment; and the men who served under him said there was not a braver or better officer in the whole service.

After I had told my story exactly as the circumstances which gave rise to it occurred, Mr. Thomson gave me a keen searching glance, and very abruptly asked me what stories the man I had relieved had been putting in my head.

I replied, none; that he was very uncommunicative, and would hardly give any reason for leaving, except that the life was so dull.

'Very well,' was the quick answer; 'I'll give you a man to stay a few days. Some one has been hoaxing you, or, more likely still, you've dreamt the whole affair.—Here, Wilson, you must go off to the lighthouse for a few days; this man here thinks he's been hearing ghosts, or some nonsense of that sort, out yonder. You'd better go with him, and show him what rubbish it is; for I think you fear neither man nor devil.'

'Well, sir,' was the reply, 'as regards the devil, I never come athwart his hawse yet, thank God! but I do hope, by the aid of a fair conscience, as I shouldn't miss stays if I did.'

'Very well,' was the reply, 'that's settled.—Wilson will keep you company for a few days, and I hope I shall hear no more of the matter. No doubt you had a bad nightmare; and I'd recommend you to keep a sharper eye after your lamps, and then it won't occur again. That'll do.'

With this curt decision we were dismissed, and Wilson (who happened to be the man to whom I had spoken on my first arrival)

and I strolled to his cottage to get what things he required while with me. On our way I retold my story; and although he was evidently incredulous as to its being anything but a dream, he asked me to say nothing of it to his wife, who was very poorly. His wife evidently did not relish his going, but there was no disobeying the orders he had received; so, after having our dinner at his cottage, we returned together to the lighthouse. Everything was in its place as I had left it, and when we explored the cellar together, the same fastenings were upon the door that I had placed there the night before. However, we now nailed it closely up; and the evening, enlivened by Wilson's sea-yarns, passed quickly enough away till twelve o'clock, without anything occurring; and after that we agreed to take alternate two-hour watches in the 'lantern.' Not a sound broke the stillness all night; and as we sat down together to breakfast in the morning, I received the bantering of my companion upon my dream, as he called it, with an uncomfortable sensation of having made a fool of myself.

The days passed away thus till Thursday, not a single event occurring out of the common, and I had by this time thoroughly persuaded myself that I had fallen asleep and dreamt all the horrors about which I had made such a stir. Towards noon on that day, a boat came off with a message for Wilson, to the effect that his wife had had a bad epileptic fit the night before, and was then very ill. I could not offer any opposition to his departure under such circumstances, and had even so well recovered my ordinary nerve, that when he asked me if he should send another man to take his place, I said no; all the noises I had heard must have been the effect of imagination, and I was quite content to remain alone. So he went off. Friday, and Friday night, passed quietly enough, and on Saturday morning I was obliged to go on shore to get some provisions I wanted. I was doubtful at first whether I would go, as the day was dark and louring, with heavy banks of leaden-looking clouds to windward, which betokened a coming gale. However, I determined to risk it, and make as much haste as I could; and taking advantage of the wind (now rising every minute), was only away about two hours. On my return, I made all due preparations for a stormy night, doubly barring the doors and putting battens on all the lower windows. After the lamps were lighted, I stood for some time at one of the windows above, watching the warring of the elements. The black scud flew across the heavens as though rushing in terror from the fierce wind that howled across the waters, and the sea seemed turned into a gigantic caldron of seething foam, save when, like monsters arising from the deep, the huge black waves met each other with a furious roar, the foamy atoms into which they dashed themselves glistening in the murky night, till swept away by the wind.

The scene was a grand one; but, with a feeling of compassion for all in distress at sea that night, I turned to the more congenial view of my bright little fire, beside which I now sat down and smoked till nearly ten, arousing myself at that hour to write a letter of some importance to my brother. The subject upon which I was engaged had reference to some accounts which I had examined for him some time before, and respecting which he had written to me. The letter necessarily contained a quantity of figures, and I was so deeply engaged upon them, that I paid no heed to the flight of time, till, with a sense of horror amounting almost to sickness, I heard the sound of oaths and blows emanating from the cellar. A moment's pause, and the footstep I had heard before ascended the stair; and as I crouched into a corner, with eyes dilated and every hair upon my head moving in my agony of terror, the sound of scuffling commenced close by me, though, as before, not a thing was visible. Again the sounds appeared to descend the stair; again, above the howling of the wind and the roar of the waves, arose the agonised entreaty, 'George, George! for God's sake don't murder me!'

How I passed the remainder of that night, I hardly know. Nothing more occurred; but I was so unstrung by what I had for the second time heard, that I remained, Heaven knows how long, crouching by my bedside, muttering incoherent prayers, and in a state of hysterical fear which almost bereft me of my senses. With the first streak of dawn I prepared to go on shore, at great risk to myself; for though the sea had been somewhat beaten down by a heavy fall of rain, it was still much too rough to be quite safe for a small boat with only one man to manage it. However, I got safely on shore, and instantly went direct to Mr. Thomson's cottage, and told him what had taken place for the second time.

'This is very strange, my man,' he said, eyeing me with no particular favour. 'This thing happened to you when you were alone before. I give you a man I can trust in, and nothing takes place while he is there; but the moment his back is turned, you come to me with a cock-and-a-bull story, which I tell you candidly I don't believe.'

I replied that he might believe it or not, as pleased him; that I had told him nothing but the truth; and begged to be allowed to give up my situation at once, as, I said, no earthly consideration would induce me to pass a night alone again in the lighthouse.

He looked hard at me for a moment, and then said, 'Of course it is your own fancy; but something has evidently frightened you. I will try you once more, and get Wilson to stay with you this next week; and next Saturday night I will myself come off and stay with you.'

We went down together to Wilson's cottage; and although his wife was still very unwell, Mr. Thomson got him to agree to come

off with me at once, and stay the next week, and on the Saturday he himself would join us.

We returned to the lighthouse at once, Wilson in no very good temper, and evidently thinking me a cowardly fool, or that I was hoaxing him. When we got off, he insisted on going down to the cellar with me. Everything was as we had left it, save that the door, which we had fastened with long nails, was ajar, *the nails seeming to have been wrenched from the wood!* I at once assured my companion that I had never been down the steps since he was with me. He heard me in silence, but with evident incredulity; and together we fastened up the door in such a manner that nothing short of sledge-hammers would open it, and returned to the watch-room.

The days and nights went quickly by, nothing occurring to alarm or disturb us in the slightest degree. Wilson recovered his good temper on hearing that his wife (to whom he was deeply attached) was much better, and proved himself, as before, a most entertaining companion.

At about four o'clock on Saturday afternoon Mr. Thomson came off, and asked us banteringly what we had heard.

The reply of course was, 'Nothing.'

'Nor ever will,' was the answer. 'However, I'll look-out with you to-night.'

He then questioned me closely upon the exact situation and description of sounds I had heard, and minutely examined the whole place. The fastenings of the cellar-door were not removed, but an additional padlock put on, as also on the lighthouse-door.

Mr. Thomson then said that, as the sounds appeared to begin and end in the cellar, towards eleven o'clock we would post ourselves, armed with revolvers, opposite the door, and wait the event. I certainly did not much relish the prospect; but the other two seemed so cool and confident, that I could make no demur. We passed a pleasant evening in the watch-room, till, at twenty minutes to eleven, the revolvers were carefully looked to, and, with a large ship's lantern throwing out a brilliant light, we descended the spiral stair in a body, and hanging up the light, waited what might ensue. It was a very calm night, and the gentle ripple of the waves against the rock was barely audible, and so profound was the dead silence, that we could hear the slow monotonous ticking of the clock in the watch-room. As we stood and waited, we knew not for what, in almost the foundations of that lonesome building, the minutes seemed like hours, as we eyed each other and the damp grim walls around. Suddenly the little bell of the clock in my room rang out eleven, and during the minute or two that ensued we held our very breaths in expectation.

All at once the struggling and oaths commenced close to us in the cellar. The words were audible now—'Down, d—n you, down!'



J. A. Pasquier, del.

Edmund Evans, sc.

in harsh rough tones, intermingled with heavy blows and feeble moans for mercy.

Suddenly, before our very faces, the door which we had fastened so carefully flew open, and the step went by us as we crouched back almost into the very wall. The struggling now sounded up in the watch-room, and then again seemed coming nearer to us, step by step, as if a heavy body was being lifted down the stair. I glanced at my companions; they were both ashy pale, but seemed calm and resolute. The steps came nearer, nearer, and again passed into the cellar; and again the wild cry of 'George, George! for God's sake don't murder me!' rang out close by; and as the words died away, a vision appeared before us, the horror of which, even at this lapse of time, makes me shut my eyes in dread. By the light of a pale lambent flame that seemed to spring from every part of the cellar, we saw the dead body of a man lying on the ground, the face and head so battered and covered with blood as to make the features undistinguishable. Over it stood a woman in her night-dress, her arms extended as if to ward off a blow, while from a gaping wound in her throat the blood poured down in torrents. I remember the agonised entreaty visible in the large blue eyes, and the rippling masses of golden hair contrasting strongly with the blood-covered bosom—but no more; for I fell insensible. When I came to, I found myself in bed, and so deplorably weak that I could barely turn round. I had been nearly dying, it afterwards turned out, from an attack of brain-fever, brought on, the doctor said, by over-mental excitement.

It appeared, on after inquiry, that the vision scarcely lasted a moment after I became insensible; that Mr. Thomson and Wilson, who had retained their senses, although terribly alarmed, had carried me upstairs, when, finding that I only roused out of my insensibility to become delirious, I had been removed to the hospital, where I had remained ever since. Mr. Thomson was so much impressed by what he had witnessed, that he determined to have the lighthouse thoroughly searched; and next day, taking a large party and plenty of light, the cellar was closely investigated, and the hammer which lay in the corner found to be covered with blood and human hair. Close by the wall, and, as nearly as they could judge, below where the vision had appeared, a large stone had been apparently recently moved, and Mr. Thomson determined to take it up. This was done; and after removing a quantity of loose sand, the decomposing bodies of a man and woman were discovered exactly as they had appeared to us—the woman in her night-dress with her throat cut, and the man with the skull horribly fractured and the face beaten in.

The remains were identified as the wife of the late keeper, and the son of a neighbouring farmer, who used to be a good deal at the lighthouse. Information was at once given to the police of the

discovery of the double murder, as no doubt it was, and a strict search was instituted after the late keeper. It was months before he was traced, and then only found almost on his deathbed.

Before he died, however, he confessed the crime with which he was charged, and even described how it was committed.

It appeared that he had long suspected his wife of too close an intimacy with a young man in the neighbourhood; and one Friday night, while on shore, received what, to his jealous mind, was a confirmation of his suspicions, and, frenzied with rage, determined to have revenge. The next night he contrived to get the young fellow off to the lighthouse; and after plying him with drink till he was almost insensible, he dragged him to the cellar, and dispatched him with repeated blows of a sledge-hammer.

Maddened with brandy, and now determined to complete his vengeance, he rushed upstairs and dragged his wife down from her bed; and showing her the mangled remains of her supposed lover, cut her throat, in spite of her entreaties and declarations of innocence.

Fearing lest the sea should reveal the crime, he buried the bodies in the cellar, and taking a few valuable articles to divert suspicion, fled the spot.

Even while in the throes of that death which defeated the ends of justice, he declared that by day and night his wife had haunted him, and that, from the hour in which he had done the deed, to the time he had confessed it, he had never known one moment's peace.

Philosophers may account for the scenes I have related, or learnedly disprove them, as they please; I only know that, from being an utter unbeliever in the supernatural, I have now got so much faith in it, that, though my present way of life is quite unconnected with the sea, I never hear the plash of the waves without recalling with a reminiscent shudder the hours I passed on the 'Haunted Rock.'

WHAT A GHOST-STORY DID

'ALL in the dark!'

The door opened, heavy steps were heard, and a voice said, 'All in the dark!'

'Papa, how you startled us!' said a girl's voice, almost from the floor—the speaker sitting on the hearth-rug, one knee slightly raised, her two hands clasped over it, and nothing visible in the semi-darkness of the room but a heap of white muslin, with the moonlight streaming full upon it through the large unclosed bay-window; a similar patch of white a yard or two off; and a dark figure sitting on a low chair at the other end of the room, with two bright bars moving in front—a pair of knitting-needles—showing the busy mother at her constant occupation. One of her favourite maxims was, 'Always be doing something.'

She certainly carried it thoroughly out herself. The same could not be said of her daughter on the rug: she dearly loved what she called 'resting' (from what, it was difficult to say); but being an only child, she got a good deal of her own way. So when, on leaving the dining-room, she and her cousin had begged for half an hour without lights, Mrs. Vernon had on this occasion given up her maxim, and they were all thoroughly enjoying the darkness, which, as Ellen Vernon said, 'makes one feel so sociable.'

The gentlemen—the father, a bachelor uncle, and a boy cousin home from Eton for the holidays—stayed some time over their wine, adhering to the old custom; and it was on opening the drawing-room door to join the ladies that Colonel Vernon exclaimed, 'All in the dark!'

On hearing his daughter answer 'Us;' he said, 'Who are us? I can see nobody.—George,' as by the sound he guessed his brother was tumbling over the furniture, 'take care; don't break your knees, or my chairs. It's this silly child's fancy, I know—dreaming in the moonlight, or gossiping—pulling your neighbours to pieces—eh, Nelly?'

'What a shame! Fancy mamma talking scandal! What have you and uncle George been discussing—something very interesting? You've been such a long time! Where's Ned?'

'Gone to look after his new ferrets. That boy is wild after any kind of sport. But there, he is just what I was at his age, so I oughtn't to grumble. Here he comes.—Well, have you seen after the new treasures? Jones hadn't forgotten to feed them, had he?'

'No, I never supposed he had; but it's as well to be sure; they should have plenty to eat at first. I mean to have rare sport next week; and you girls can come too, if you like.'

'Thank you, most polite of boys,' rejoined his cousin. They were very fond of each other, but, cousin-like, were always chaffing. 'O, I forgot, you're not a boy; Eton fellows are never boys, always men. I won't offend again; I beg the whole school's pardon, from the head-master to the smallest fag. Don't annihilate me. Also, it is as well you should know, that white thing you are so quietly walking upon is my dress—not by any means meant for you to make a carpet of.'

'I'm so sorry, Nell; but why are you sitting in the dark? Are you telling ghost-stories? I declare it would be a jolly time for a good story; that moonlight looks ghostified enough. I'll promise to scream or faint—which is the correct thing?—or I'll carry any of you out that do, and dip you in the fountain—warranted to cure any fainting or hysterics.—Does any one know a story? Nell, you're always ready to talk, and you're first-rate at odd bits of information; can't you tell one?'

'No, I can't; and what's more, I don't think I ever heard a real ghost-story; I certainly don't remember it.—Mamma, you used to tell us lots of stories; did you ever tell us ghostly ones? or can you think of one now? I should like it of all things,—shouldn't you, Constance?' turning to her cousin, who had been silent since the male addition to the party.

'Don't do anything of the sort, Maria, I do beg.' And they were quite startled by the earnest, almost imploring, tone.

There was a movement in the darkest corner of the room, as George Temple (Mrs. Vernon's brother) advanced to the fireplace, and felt for the bell.

'I'll ring for lights.'

'O, uncle, don't!' exclaimed Nelly.

'I say, uncle, did you ever see a ghost?' called out Ned at the same moment.

'Don't talk nonsense,' George Temple replied. He rang the bell sharply, and then, groping his way to the door, left the room.

'Has George gone?' said Colonel Vernon. 'Poor fellow! he feels it, I do believe, as deeply as ever.'

'Yes,' replied his wife; 'George is not one to forget. I did not remember him when the children were talking about ghosts; I ought to have stopped them. No wonder he could not bear it.'

'Mamma, what is it? did uncle ever see a ghost? What made him so odd?'

'I don't believe in ghosts; such rubbish is only fit for silly old women. I'm sure uncle George is much too sensible,' said Ned.

'Do tell us, aunt!' gently entreated his sister Constance.

'Even your curiosity roused, Constance!' replied Mrs. Vernon, with an attempt at a laugh—a very poor attempt too. 'No, dears, I don't think I can tell you. It is a very sad story; my poor brother has never got over it. You know how quiet, almost sad, he is. I remember him the brightest, merriest fellow possible—always full of fun and high spirits. But no wonder. How I wish I had stopped the subject to-night! I believe it will bring the whole scene back, and quite prey upon him, though it is so many years ago.'

'You must tell us, please—O, do!' And Nelly came and stood beside her mother, putting one arm round her neck.

'Papa, make mamma tell us; there can't be any harm in it; we'll never repeat it, I'll solemnly promise—won't you, Connie, and Ned too?'

'All right,' the Etonian said; 'I don't mind hearing, though I am not so curious as you girls.'

'No, I should think not—it looks like it' (Nelly's propensity to tease getting the better of her curiosity). 'But you are not compelled to stay; you can retire into the garden, and show your manly disregard of our weakness; only don't come to-morrow and try to get it out of me—I won't tell you a word.—Mamma dear, you will tell us, won't you? I hear John bringing the lamp; so, if your story is very horrible, we sha'n't be so frightened. Was it a real ghost? I didn't think there were such things.'

'My dear, it was the consequences of a ghost-story, not the story itself, or even seeing a ghost, that affected your uncle. I daresay, like Ned, he does not believe there are such things, though I confess I do.' Then, turning to her husband, 'I don't see it will do any harm to tell them, as they wish it so much. What do you say? It may warn Ned never to do such a thing.'

'I hope he doesn't require such a terrible warning; the whole thing was most unpardonable. I have only heard your account; but if I had been present, I think I should have half killed Major Gordon; he certainly would have got a thrashing. Yes, you had better tell them, if you like; only remember, all of you, the subject is never to be mentioned again before your uncle—mind that. I'll go and see after him now; perhaps he is in the library.'

'Now, mamma, we are all attention; do begin.'

It is many years ago (began Mrs. Vernon)—I was a girl of sixteen—when my father took a house for a year, two miles from a small watering-place on the Yorkshire coast. It was a very quiet place. The only house of any consequence near ours was a handsome one, with large park and beautiful gardens, belonging to a Mr. Masterton, whose family only lived there three months in the year, spending the rest of their time in London, or at a larger place he had in Northumberland. Our house—a sort of enlarged

cottage, with all kinds of odd windows in still odder places, and covered with different creepers—was just outside the park-gates. We had been living there about two months—my father and mother, your aunt Constance and myself; George, being then in the army, was with his regiment in Canada, but we expected him home, on leave, the next mail—when we heard the Mastertons were coming to Holme-park for their annual visit.

We were very anxious to see them; they would be our nearest —in fact, our only—neighbours for three months; the clergyman of the parish being an old bachelor, much liked by my father, but taking little notice of Constance and myself; and we hoped to be great friends with the family at the park.

There were two sons and four daughters — the two youngest being girls, about our own ages, sixteen and fifteen. The Mastertons arrived on a Friday. Our old Scotch nurse always said, 'No good came of anything begun on a Friday;' and this visit was ever after her pet illustration. The dining-room windows of the cottage commanded a capital view of their gates; and we two girls spent that afternoon one at each window, and were rewarded after long watching by seeing the gardener's wife at the lodge, in a great state of fuss, opening the gates and staring down the road at least half an hour before a close carriage, a private omnibus, and three cabs from the station drove up. The gardener's wife and the servants were the only people we saw that day. As the horses in the first carriage slackened their pace, turning in at the gate, a gentleman's voice called from the window, 'How are you, Mrs. Collins—flourishing, I hope? I'll come and see you to-morrow;' and that was all. Not much reward for three hours' patient watching.

The next day was thoroughly wet, and no one came to the lodge, as we half hoped they would in spite of the rain; but at half-past four a dog-cart, driven by a groom, came from the house, clearly bound for the station. An hour passed before it returned with a fair-haired man of six-and-twenty and a small bull-terrier occupying the front seat, a magnificent deer-hound lying at the man's feet, the groom and two huge portmanteaus being at the back. The driver was the eldest son—then a lieutenant in the Guards—now Colonel Masterton, the man so well known in India, to whom your uncle writes so frequently.

We saw the Mastertons at church the next Sunday. After the second service we went, as we usually did, to the vicarage for tea, where the Holme-park party also came: Mr. Masterton—a thorough country squire, strong and active, fit, in spite of his sixty years, to hold his own across country after hounds, and a capital shot; his wife, pale and delicate-looking—the sort of woman you feel assured leaves everything to be decided by her husband when young, and by her daughters when they grow up; two daughters and a gover-

ness; the eldest daughter Margaret and her second brother remaining behind in Scotland visiting some cousins.

The guardsman, considering afternoon service a work of supererogation, remained at home, strolling about the stables smoking.

I don't know how it was, but I took a fancy to Charley Masterton immediately. Charley, you must know, was not a boy, but a young lady of twenty. Her proper name was Charlotte; but her father, of whom she was the especial pet, had re-christened her Charley when a very little girl, because she was a regular little pickle, more like a boy than a girl; and the name had stuck to her ever since. She was not really handsome, still less would you have called her pretty; but she was essentially bright-looking—no other word suited her so well. I can hardly describe her particularly; yet she stands as vividly before my mind's eye now as she did in bodily presence more than twenty years ago.

She was a general favourite, especially with gentlemen; they called her 'so fascinating,' and seemed all of them more or less in love with her dark eyes, irregular features, and bright speaking face, set off by quantities of brown hair always very fashionably dressed. She was proud of this hair, often saying it was her only beauty, so she must make the most of it. I remember thinking, that first Sunday, how I should like to have my hair done the same way, and to be a 'come-out' young lady like her.

At first Charley talked principally to the vicar, inquiring after half the parish. Presently she turned to me, asking about a peculiar Russian cat we had, saying she was quite foolish about all kinds of animals—we must come and see her collection—and then she went on to other subjects. She must have found both Constance and me very stupid. We had seen very little of the world, and were shy; but Miss Masterton did not seem to mind that, and took such trouble to amuse us, and make us talk, that before she rose to say 'Good-bye' we were quite charmed with her; in fact, we liked all the family, and the liking seemed mutual; the elders of both houses making out many common friends. So in a short time we became very intimate; hardly a day passed without our meeting; and when my brother George came home, it continued just the same.

George was then thirty—tall, with gray eyes, straight well-cut features, golden brown hair and whiskers—in short, a very nice-looking young fellow; and very proud we were of him.

The Mastertons had a party of gentlemen staying with them for shooting, and George, being a great sportsman, was at Holme-park daily.

It would take too long to tell you how George Temple and Charley Masterton fell in love with each other; but so they did; and though there were difficulties at first—Mr. Masterton objecting to his daughter marrying a soldier, and Charley being too sensible to

wish him to leave the army, though he was quite willing to do so for her sake—yet, on the whole, their course of love ran pretty smoothly; and it was settled they were to be married in six months, so as to join his regiment in Canada the next summer.

Mrs. Masterton had an idea her daughter was being exiled to a kind of Siberia, and moaned continually over it; and Charley's spirit of fun often prompted her to horrify her mother by predicting she should come back a regular colonial officer's wife, calling people by their surnames, and perpetually talking of 'our fellows.'

Those six months were a very merry happy period for us. The Mastertons spent most of the time at Holme-park, and we grew to like our future sister-in-law more and more. The days passed quickly, and March came, and the important day and all necessary arrangements were settled.

It was two days before the wedding—that was fixed for the 8th of April, a Thursday. The Monday before, Charley said to my mother in her coaxing way, she should like to spend a last evening at our house; could she come that night? The next day all the guests for the marriage would arrive, and she could not well manage it then.

So it was settled that she, George (who dined almost daily at the Hall), and any of the others who liked, should walk across the park after dinner.

Accordingly about eight o'clock (people dined earlier than they do now twenty years ago) we saw them coming—Charley, George, Margaret Masterton (Charley's elder sister), her brother Robert, and a distant cousin of theirs—Major Gordon, who, his regiment having recently come into the country, spent much of his time at Holme-park.

I must describe him fully, or you will hardly understand his part in the catastrophe.

Alan Gordon, the younger son of a Scotch peer, was wonderfully superstitious, and a great hand at curious 'uncanny' stories. It puzzled me then, and has done so often since, whether he really believed what he said. However, he had a remarkably *real* way of talking of the supernatural.

His stories were very odd—decidedly improbable—not to say against all reason; but he seemed to believe them himself so thoroughly, that, against your will, they impressed you. I believe he had that effect upon many strong sensible men. I know my father, the most practical person alive, used to say his tales were most unaccountable; but 'Gordon's head was in a mist, like his native mountains.'

All that generation of Gordons were more or less in the same way. Of late years I have met several of them, and have heard them gravely declare the gift of second-sight was in their family. I am sure Alan believed so, though it seems unheard of in these days that educated people could be so superstitious.

Putting aside this belief in ghostly appearances, in other respects Major Gordon was a sensible man, extremely agreeable, and a general favourite in society. He was about forty—a tall powerful man, with light hair, and a round good-natured face; but his naturally merry expression was spoilt by a habit of rolling his eyes when speaking, till often only the whites were visible. He was a thorough soldier; had been much on foreign service, consequently the Mastertons knew very little of him. Indeed, I do not think the younger part of the family had even seen him till his visit to Holme-park some two months before; but they liked him much now, Charley especially. She was always asking about his adventures, and getting him to tell her stories. She owned they frightened her; that she could not bear to think of them afterwards; still there was a fascination in them.

I don't know whether I ever told you, one curious thing about Charley was her horror of the dark. A dark room sent a shudder through her. It was extremely silly, and she often said as much, knowing nothing could hurt her; but still the fear remained. She never seemed able to get over it. I do not think any power on earth would have tempted her to stay five minutes by herself in perfect darkness. We used to fancy she had been frightened, when a child, by a foolish nurse; but that never was proved. You can imagine how we all, and especially the Masterton boys, teased her, calling her 'a goose, and afraid of her own shadow;' but it was of no avail; and all had at last become so used to her fear, no notice was taken of it.

Well, that Monday night they came—three Mastertons and Major Gordon. It was a lovely night; the air warm as June, the moon just rising, as we went across the lawn to meet them. There were exclamations on the beauty of the weather, and many hopes that Thursday would be as fine; my father laughingly telling Charley, 'If it rained, she must put off her wedding: rain was so unlucky.'

Upon this Major Gordon, who was walking with my mother and Margaret Masterton, turned round, and said in fun,

'Mark my words, Charley; that wedding of yours won't come off—you will see. Remember the proverb, "There's many a slip," &c.'

We little thought, as we listened to her merry reply, 'If Captain Temple changes his mind, you'll have to take compassion on a forlorn damsel and marry me yourself; and that will be a punishment for your impertinence, sir; for I shall plague your life out'—we little thought how sadly true his words would prove.

I must make my story short, though it is difficult to do so, remembering, as I do, every action—nay, every trivial word spoken that evening. They passed unheeded at the time, till the awful end of that merry party stamped everything connected with it on my brain, till nothing will efface the impression.

We lingered some time in the garden, then went into the house and had tea; and it must have been nearly ten o'clock, when, sitting in the drawing-room talking, Margaret (poor girl, it has quite haunted her since to think that she proposed it) said,

'Alan should tell one of his stories.—Mrs. Temple, have you ever heard one of cousin Alan's ghost-stories? He tells them wonderfully. Wouldn't you like to hear him? Charley actually believes in ghosts, and Alan says she is as good as a Scotchwoman!'

Several of us exclaimed,

'It would be capital fun; and Major Gordon must tell one.'

He agreed; but said the lights must be put out; no one could tell a good horrible story in the face of two lamps and four candles; and if the blinds were up, there would be just the proper ghostly light. He had his way; and I remember well how bright the moon shone, making the grass look like snow contrasted with the intense blackness of the clump of tall trees some twenty yards off.

The room we were in had a large bow-window at one end. Close to this window, but rather in shadow, so that only the outline of his figure was visible, sat Major Gordon; near him, on a low chair, was Margaret Masterton; and Charley was on the floor at her feet, with her hands clasped on her sister's knee, and her eyes gazing out into the moonlight, apparently fascinated by the weird shadows. The rest of the party were scattered in other parts of the darkened room.

'It is at least ten years ago,' began Major Gordon, 'that I was taking a walking tour through the northern part of Sutherlandshire. It is a curious part of the country for such an expedition; I can hardly say why I chose it—perhaps from its being almost the only spot in my native land I knew literally nothing of. I had been shooting woodcock with some fellows in the Hebrides, and a very jolly party we made. When our sport was over, we all went east together. At Stour I left them, starting on my own hook, in spite of much chaff at my choosing such a country and such a time—the end of November—for a tour. I suppose none of you have been in Sutherlandshire; it is just about the wildest, most desolate place you can imagine; the wild grand scenery that impresses one with admiration, mingled with a sense of one's own insignificance. As I walked day after day through immense tracts of moorland, hardly ever meeting a human creature, a feeling of loneliness and utter desolation—a sort of hopelessness of ever again arriving at civilisation—came over me, and I resolved, that as it was my first, so it should be my last visit to Sutherlandshire.

'I must tell you there were hardly any inns. I generally slept at farm-houses. The people were hospitable, though primitive, and my welcome was generally cordial. I went on in this way for a week, when, feeling I had had quite enough of it, I started one morning from my sleeping quarters, intending to walk some twenty

miles to a town on the coast, whence a coach went monthly to Inverness. I missed my way; for, as night began to close, I found my road stopped by a small river, with no means of crossing it. I followed the banks for perhaps three miles. At last I saw a light; on nearer approach I found it came from a considerable-sized house. Though now inhabited by a farmer, it had evidently seen better days; there were remains of handsome gates; part of the original house had been pulled down, part converted into farm buildings. One wing remained perfect, and towards a door in the centre of this I directed my steps. After much knocking, the door was opened by a servant-girl, who stared when I asked if I could have a bed for the night; and saying she would ask "the master," shut the door. When the master came—a rather stupid though pleasant-looking man—he seemed doubtful, was afraid they had no room for strangers, but would see; I might come in and have a rest and a bit of supper, if I pleased. Nothing loath, I followed him into a comfortable kitchen, where his wife was busy preparing the meal; and in a few minutes we sat down to enjoy it—myself, the farmer, his wife, the girl who had come to the door, three or four farm-labourers, and an old woman, deaf and seemingly half-witted—the farmer's mother, as I found afterwards.

'After supper I asked about my bed. Then arose a difficulty. The wife said, "There was no room." I suggested, "The kitchen would do." She said, "The mother slept there." I asked, "Was there another house near?" She said, "Not for six miles." At last the farmer whispered something to his wife. She exclaimed, "For heaven's sake, don't put the gentleman there!" I asked, "Where?" And the man explained: There were two rooms they had never used; there were queer noises in them—he believed they were haunted; but perhaps one of them might be better than the big barn, the only alternative? I said, "Certainly; I would face the ghosts." And, in spite of the earnest entreaties of the wife, so it was settled.

'I went with the farmer to inspect the rooms, and chose the smaller of the two. There was no furniture in either, but the farming men brought in three benches; we placed them side by side, spread some blankets on them, and my bed was ready. A glorious fire was made up, and, in spite of ghosts, I congratulated myself on my quarters. On returning to the kitchen for my knapsack, the moment I appeared, the old woman ran towards me—I had no idea anything so bent and crooked had such pace in her—and flinging herself on her knees before me, prayed me, "For God's sake, do not sleep in that accursed room!"

'This rather startled me; but I thought her out of her mind, so tried to soothe her, assuring her nothing was likely to happen; I was sure there was nothing in the rooms, and wondered they did

not use them. She only grew more earnest, sobbing and rocking herself backwards and forwards, crying, "I should be dead before morning! She knew I should! It was just the same before!"

'Her words seemed strange, but she looked a poor demented creature; so, finding my soothing quite ineffectual, I cut the matter short by taking my bag and leaving the kitchen. I wished the farmer good-night outside my door, and was alone. The hot kitchen, after the long cold walk, had made me drowsy. Before many minutes I was in bed and asleep. How long I slept, I know not. Something, I can hardly tell what, awoke me. The fire had burnt low, still there was sufficient light to see there was no one in the room save myself; but an icy chill crept over me, a consciousness of not being alone possessed me. I sat up and stared round. There was nothing. Still the feeling grew stronger. Suddenly I heard a groan—another, deeper, louder, nearer—and a hand, cold like a corpse's, was laid on my shoulder. I started round; every particle of blood froze in my veins, for I saw—'

At this moment Major Gordon uttered a loud piercing shriek. It was a trick. The whole story had been nonsense! He only did it to frighten us; but—the effect was terrible. His shriek was hardly ended, when, almost joined to it, we heard a most fearful cry, a long agonising scream. You can never realise what it was like. I shall never forget it. It seemed really like a spirit being torn out of its body. Another, louder still, but stopping suddenly—not as it were ended, but broken off in the middle—and Charley Masterton's head fell heavily on her sister's knee. Every one started up. Major Gordon said,

'Who screamed? You're none of you frightened, are you?'

Margaret laid her hand on Charley's head, saying,

'My darling, what is the matter? Didn't you know that it was only Alan's nonsense? I knew his voice directly!'

Then, as she grew frightened at the silence,

'O, Charley! what is it? Do speak!'

But there was no answer. George sprang across the room.

'She has fainted. Bring a light. Some one get a candle, or anything.'

He lifted her up; lights were brought; and she was laid on the sofa; but still she neither moved nor spoke. George kept repeating,

'She has only fainted, she has only fainted.'

But I saw how his whole frame shook, and his face became deadly pale; and a dreadful fear came over me that she would never speak again. Alas, alas, it was so! Charley Masterton was dead; had died of sheer fright! She lay there with an awful terror fixed on her face. We all stood round for some seconds, too awe-stricken to do anything; George, supporting her head on his arm, repeating over and over again,

'She has only fainted! Can't you see it is only fainting?'

But at last he grew silent. Then my father spoke.

'I will send for a doctor.'

He walked to the door, and we heard him outside giving orders for the groom to start immediately. When he came back, laying his hand on George's arm,

'My poor boy!' he said, 'I have sent for Blake; but I fear—I fear nothing can be done.'

Then turning to young Masterton,

'Some one must break this to your father; can you do it?'

At his words Robert Masterton roused himself; since the first he had stood motionless by the sofa, hardly realising his sister's state. Now he started, stooped, pressed his lips on her forehead; then all of a sudden seeming to understand, strode across the room to where Major Gordon sat, shook him roughly by the shoulder, saying in a voice low, but fierce with concentrated passion,

'You murderer! look at your work! How dare you try your devilish trick upon her! Go and tell my father you have killed his daughter: you are the fittest person to tell him. Go! By heaven, if Temple does not kill you, I will!'

When Charley was first laid on the sofa, Alan Gordon looked once on her face. He had seen death too often to doubt its aspect now. Then he walked to the window, sat down, burying his face in his clasped hands, and never moved till he heard Robert's words. Now he sprang up, confronting him haughtily; a savage frown darkening his face; gradually it faded; a look of intense pain succeeded, a look of almost agonised regret, and he answered in a low broken voice,

'I never meant to hurt her. I would give my life, ay, ten lives, to undo this night's work; I did it in fun—devilish fun, you say right—but—but—' Here a sob broke his voice: he walked to the door, then said, 'I will go and tell them! It will kill my uncle; I shall be a double murderer.'

His hand was on the door. Suddenly he turned, rushed across the room, flinging himself on the floor by the sofa.

'O, Charley! dear Charley! you cannot be dead! It is not true! I have not killed you! Say so! O, speak!'

My mother gently pushed him away, saying,

'Go—do go; you can do no good; don't stay here.'

He rose, staggered across the room; my father followed him out and shut the door.

We that remained tried various restoratives, feeling their utter uselessness, but from a feeling of restless anxiety to try something. Then the doctor came. A brief examination only confirmed the worst. It was all over, poor Charley's short bright life; and nothing remained but to carry her home—the senseless body to its earthly home. But the spirit, the kind loving heart?—ah! we could

not doubt whither that had gone—to the only true home, compared with which the brightest, happiest earthly lot (and Charley's had been a very bright happy one) fades into utter blankness.

I cannot describe the rest. You must picture to yourself the father's intense grief, the mother's silent anguish; the awful stillness in the house so lately resounding with merry wedding preparations, as they bore her, a pale silent corpse, on the very road she should have travelled a happy bride, under the half-finished arches the village people had been busy all day erecting; the church-bell sadly, solemnly tolling out the twenty-one years. It must have been just midnight, for the bell had hardly ceased when the clock struck twelve; and I remember well the awful shudder I felt—(it seems to creep through me now)—the feeling some one else must be dead, that that bell would never be still—would go on tolling for ever.

I need not tell you how George felt this cutting off at one blow of all his happiness. Poor dear fellow, he has never got over it yet. It was very quiet, very deep grief; I do not think he ever shed a tear. Never to this day has he spoken of her; but I have seen him—ay, not a year ago—shudder and turn pale at the careless mention of the name Charley; and I am very sure his only wish, his only hope, has been to follow her, to meet her again, never to be parted. But people do not die for wishing; and after long years in India (he went there six months after her death), after active service during the Mutiny, and many hardships, he is still a strong man; but, as you all know, he always seems one burdened, almost broken down, with heavy secret sorrow. And this was the cause—a seemingly trivial thing, which many would call a harmless practical joke; and yet look at the awful consequences!

Major Gordon I have never seen, since he left the country immediately, and for many years was never even heard of; but I believe he is alive still.

The Masterton family are much scattered; some married, some dead—But hush! not another word on the subject; here comes your uncle George!



J. A. Pasquier, del. Edmund Evans, sc.

Digitized

AT CHRIGHTON ABBEY

A Tale

THE Chrightons were very great people in that part of the country where my childhood and youth were spent. To speak of Squire Chrighton was to speak of a power in that remote western region of England. Chrighton Abbey had belonged to the family ever since the reign of Stephen, and there was a curious old wing and a cloistered quadrangle still remaining of the original edifice, and in excellent preservation. The rooms at this end of the house were low, and somewhat darksome and gloomy, it is true; but, though rarely used, they were perfectly habitable, and were of service on great occasions when the Abbey was crowded with guests.

The central portion of the Abbey had been rebuilt in the reign of Elizabeth, and was of noble and palatial proportions. The southern wing, and a long music-room with eight tall narrow windows added on to it, were as modern as the time of Anne. Altogether, the Abbey was a very splendid mansion, and one of the chief glories of our county.

All the land in Chrighton parish, and for a long way beyond its boundaries, belonged to the great Squire. The parish church was within the park walls, and the living in the Squire's gift—not a very valuable benefice, but a useful thing to bestow upon a younger son's younger son, once in a way, or sometimes on a tutor or dependent of the wealthy house.

I was a Chrighton, and my father, a distant cousin of the reigning Squire, had been rector of Chrighton parish. His death left me utterly unprovided for, and I was fain to go out into the bleak unknown world, and earn my living in a position of dependence—a dreadful thing for a Chrighton to be obliged to do.

Out of respect for the traditions and prejudices of my race, I made it my business to seek employment abroad, where the degradation of one solitary Chrighton was not so likely to inflict shame upon the ancient house to which I belonged. Happily for myself, I had been carefully educated, and had industriously cultivated the usual modern accomplishments in the calm retirement of the Vicarage. I was so fortunate as to obtain a situation at Vienna, in a German family of high rank; and here I remained seven years, laying aside year by year a considerable portion of my liberal salary. When my pupils had grown up, my kind mistress procured me a still more profitable position at St. Petersburg, where I remained five more years, at the end of which time I yielded to a yearning that had been

long growing upon me—an ardent desire to see my dear old country home once more.

I had no very near relations in England. My mother had died some years before my father; my only brother was far away, in the Indian Civil Service; sister I had none. But I was a Chrighton, and I loved the soil from which I had sprung. I was sure, moreover, of a warm welcome from friends who had loved and honoured my father and mother, and I was still farther encouraged to treat myself to this holiday by the very cordial letters I had from time to time received from the Squire's wife, a noble warm-hearted woman, who fully approved the independent course I had taken, and who had ever shown herself my friend.

In all her letters for some time past Mrs. Chrighton begged that, whenever I felt myself justified in coming home, I would pay a long visit to the Abbey.

'I wish you could come at Christmas,' she wrote, in the autumn of the year of which I am speaking. 'We shall be very gay, and I expect all kinds of pleasant people at the Abbey. Edward is to be married early in the spring—much to his father's satisfaction, for the match is a good and appropriate one. His *fiancée* is to be among our guests. She is a very beautiful girl; perhaps I should say handsome rather than beautiful. Julia Tremaine, one of the Tremaines of Old Court, near Hayswell—a very old family, as I daresay you remember. She has several brothers and sisters, and will have little, perhaps nothing, from her father; but she has a considerable fortune left her by an aunt, and is thought quite an heiress in the county—not, of course, that this latter fact had any influence with Edward. He fell in love with her at an assize ball in his usual impulsive fashion, and proposed to her in something less than a fortnight. It is, I hope and believe, a thorough love-match on both sides.'

After this followed a cordial repetition of the invitation to myself. I was to go straight to the Abbey when I went to England, and was to take up my abode there as long as ever I pleased.

This letter decided me. The wish to look on the dear scenes of my happy childhood had grown almost into a pain. I was free to take a holiday, without detriment to my prospects. So, early in December, regardless of the bleak dreary weather, I turned my face homewards, and made the long journey from St. Petersburg to London, under the kind escort of Major Manson, a Queen's Messenger, who was a friend of my late employer, the Baron Fruydorff, and whose courtesy had been enlisted for me by that gentleman.

I was three-and-thirty years of age. Youth was quite gone; beauty I had never possessed; and I was content to think of myself as a confirmed old maid, a quiet spectator of life's great drama, disturbed by no feverish desire for an active part in the play. I had a

disposition to which this kind of passive existence is easy. There was no wasting fire in my veins. Simple duties, rare and simple pleasures, filled up my sum of life. The dear ones who had given a special charm and brightness to my existence were gone. Nothing could recall *them*, and without them actual happiness seemed impossible to me. Everything had a subdued and neutral tint; life at its best was calm and colourless, like a gray sunless day in early autumn, serene but joyless.

The old Abbey was in its glory when I arrived there, at about nine o'clock on a clear starlit night. A light frost whitened the broad sweep of grass that stretched away from the long stone terrace in front of the house to a semicircle of grand old oaks and beeches. From the music-room at the end of the southern wing, to the heavily-framed gothic windows of the old rooms on the north, there shone one blaze of light. The scene reminded me of some weird palace in a German legend; and I half expected to see the lights fade out all in a moment, and the long stone façade wrapped in sudden darkness.

The old butler, whom I remembered from my very infancy, and who did not seem to have grown a day older during my twelve years' exile, came out of the dining-room as the footman opened the hall-door for me, and gave me cordial welcome, nay insisted upon helping to bring in my portmanteau with his own hands, an act of unusual condescension, the full force of which was felt by his subordinates.

'It's a real treat to see your pleasant face once more, Miss Sarah,' said this faithful retainer, as he assisted me to take off my travelling-cloak, and took my dressing-bag from my hand. 'You look a trifle older than when you used to live at the Vicarage twelve year ago, but you're looking uncommon well for all that; and, Lord love your heart, miss, how pleased they all will be to see you! Missus told me with her own lips about your coming. You'd like to take off your bonnet before you go to the drawing-room, I daresay. The house is full of company.—Call Mrs. Marjorum, James, will you?'

The footman disappeared into the back regions, and presently reappeared with Mrs. Marjorum, a portly dame, who, like Truefold the butler, had been a fixture at the Abbey in the time of the present Squire's father. From her I received the same cordial greeting, and by her I was led off up staircases and along corridors, till I wondered where I was being taken.

We arrived at last at a very comfortable room—a square tapestried chamber, with a low ceiling supported by a great oaken beam. The room looked cheery enough, with a bright fire roaring in the wide chimney; but it had a somewhat ancient aspect, which the superstitiously inclined might have associated with possible ghosts.

I was fortunately of a matter-of-fact disposition, utterly sceptical upon the ghost subject; and the old-fashioned appearance of the room took my fancy.

'We are in King Stephen's wing, are we not, Mrs. Marjorum?' I asked; 'this room seems quite strange to me. I doubt if I have ever been in it before.'

'Very likely not, miss. Yes, this is the old wing. Your window looks out into the old stable-yard, where the kennel used to be in the time of our Squire's grandfather, when the Abbey was even a finer place than it is now, I've heard say. We are so full of company this winter, you see, miss, that we are obliged to make use of all these rooms. You'll have no need to feel lonesome. There's Captain and Mrs. Cranwick in the next room to this, and the two Miss Newports in the blue room opposite.'

'My dear good Marjorum, I like my quarters excessively; and I quite enjoy the idea of sleeping in a room that was extant in the time of Stephen, when the Abbey really was an abbey. I daresay some grave old monk has worn these boards with his devout knees.'

The old woman stared dubiously, with the air of a person who had small sympathy with monkish times, and begged to be excused for leaving me, she had so much on her hands just now.

There was coffee to be sent in; and she doubted if the still-room maid would manage matters properly, if she, Mrs. Marjorum, were not at hand to see that things were right.

'You've only to ring your bell, miss, and Susan will attend to you. She's used to help waiting on our young ladies sometimes, and she's very handy. Missus has given particular orders that she should be always at your service.'

'Mrs. Chrighton is very kind; but I assure you, Marjorum, I don't require the help of a maid once in a month. I am accustomed to do everything for myself. There, run along, Mrs. Marjorum, and see after your coffee; and I'll be down in the drawing-room in ten minutes. Are there many people there, by the bye?'

'A good many. There's Miss Tremaine, and her mamma and younger sister; of course you've heard all about the marriage—such a handsome young lady—rather too proud for my liking; but the Tremaines always were a proud family, and this one's an heiress. Mr. Edward is so fond of her—thinks the ground is scarcely good enough for her to walk upon, I do believe; and somehow I can't help wishing he'd chosen some one else—some one who would have thought more of him, and who would not take all his attentions in such a cool off-hand way. But of course it isn't my business to say such things, and I wouldn't venture upon it to any one but you, Miss Sarah.'

She told me that I would find dinner ready for me in the breakfast-room, and then bustled off, leaving me to my toilet.

This ceremony I performed as rapidly as I could, admiring the perfect comfort of my chamber as I dressed. Every modern appliance had been added to the sombre and ponderous furniture of an

age gone by, and the combination produced a very pleasant effect. Perfume-bottles of ruby-coloured Bohemian glass, china brush-trays and ring-stands brightened the massive oak dressing-table; a low luxurious chintz-covered easy-chair of the Victorian era stood before the hearth; a dear little writing-table of polished maple was placed conveniently near it; and in the background the tapestried walls loomed duskily, as they had done hundreds of years before my time.

I had no leisure for dreamy musings on the past, however, provocative though the chamber might be of such thoughts. I arranged my hair in its usual simple fashion, and put on a dark-gray silk dress, trimmed with some fine old black lace that had been given to me by the Baroness—an unobtrusive demi-toilette, adapted to any occasion. I tied a massive gold cross, an ornament that had belonged to my dear mother, round my neck with a scarlet ribbon; and my costume was complete. One glance at the looking-glass convinced me that there was nothing dowdy in my appearance; and then I hurried along the corridor and down the staircase to the hall, where Truefold received me and conducted me to the breakfast-room, in which an excellent dinner awaited me.

I did not waste much time over this repast, although I had eaten nothing all day; for I was anxious to make my way to the drawing-room. Just as I had finished, the door opened, and Mrs. Chrighton sailed in, looking superb in a dark-green velvet dress richly trimmed with old point lace. She had been a beauty in her youth, and, as a matron, was still remarkably handsome. She had, above all, a charm of expression which to me was rarer and more delightful than her beauty of feature and complexion.

She put her arms round me, and kissed me affectionately.

'I have only this moment been told of your arrival, my dear Sarah,' she said; 'and I find you have been in the house half an hour. What must you have thought of me!'

'What can I think of you, except that you are all goodness, my dear Fanny? I did not expect you to leave your guests to receive me, and am really sorry that you have done so. I need no ceremony to convince me of your kindness.'

'But, my dear child, it is not a question of ceremony. I have been looking forward so anxiously to your coming, and I should not have liked to see you for the first time before all those people. Give me another kiss, that's a darling. Welcome to Chrighton. Remember, Sarah, this house is always to be your home, whenever you have need of one.'

'My dear kind cousin! And you are not ashamed of me, who have eaten the bread of strangers?'

'Ashamed of you! No, my love; I admire your industry and spirit. And now come to the drawing-room. The girls will be so pleased to see you.'

'And I to see them. They were quite little things when I went away, romping in the hay-fields in their short white frocks; and now, I suppose, they are handsome young women.'

'They are very nice-looking; not as handsome as their brother. Edward is really a magnificent young man. I do not think my maternal pride is guilty of any gross exaggeration when I say that.'

'And Miss Tremaine?' I said. 'I am very curious to see her.'

I fancied a faint shadow came over my cousin's face as I mentioned this name.

'Miss Tremaine—yes—you cannot fail to admire her,' she said, rather thoughtfully.

She drew my hand through her arm and led me to the drawing-room; a very large room, with a fireplace at each end, brilliantly lighted to-night, and containing about twenty people, scattered about in little groups, and all seeming to be talking and laughing merrily. Mrs. Chrighton took me straight to one of the fireplaces, beside which two girls were sitting on a low sofa, while a young man of something more than six feet high stood near them, with his arm resting on the broad marble slab of the mantelpiece. A glance told me that this young man with the dark eyes and crisp waving brown hair was Edward Chrighton. His likeness to his mother was in itself enough to tell me who he was; but I remembered the boyish face and bright eyes which had so often looked up to mine in the days when the heir of the Abbey was one of the most juvenile scholars at Eton.

The lady seated nearest Edward Chrighton attracted my chief attention; for I felt sure that this lady was Miss Tremaine. She was tall and slim, and carried her head and neck with a stately air, which struck me more than anything in that first glance. Yes, she was handsome, undeniably handsome; and my cousin had been right when she said I could not fail to admire her; but to me the dazzlingly fair face with its perfect features, the marked aquiline nose, the short upper lip expressive of unmitigated pride, the full cold blue eyes, pencilled brows, and aureole of pale golden hair, wer thee very reverse of sympathetic. That Miss Tremaine must needs be universally admired, it was impossible to doubt; but I could not understand how any man could fall in love with such a woman.

She was dressed in white muslin, and her only ornament was a superb diamond locket, heart-shaped, tied round her long white throat with a broad black ribbon. Her hair, of which she seemed to have a great quantity, was arranged in a massive coronet of plaits, which surmounted the small head as proudly as an imperial crown.

To this young lady Mrs. Chrighton introduced me.

'I have another cousin to present to you, Julia,' she said smiling 'Miss Sarah Chrighton, just arrived from St. Petersburg.'

'From St. Petersburg? What an awful journey! How do you

do, Miss Chrighton? It was really very courageous of you to come so far. Did you travel alone?'

'No; I had a companion as far as London, and a very kind one. I came on to the Abbey by myself.'

The young lady had given me her hand with rather a languid air, I thought. I saw the cold blue eyes surveying me curiously from head to foot, and it seemed to me as if I could read the condemnatory summing-up—'A frump, and a poor relation'—in Miss Tremaine's face.

I had not much time to think about her just now; for Edward Chrighton suddenly seized both my hands, and gave me so hearty and loving a welcome, that he almost brought the tears 'up from my heart into my eyes.'

Two pretty girls in blue crape came running forward from different parts of the room, and gaily saluted me as 'Cousin Sarah;' and the three surrounded me in a little cluster, and assailed me with a string of questions—whether I remembered this, and whether I had forgotten that, the battle in the hayfield, the charity-school tea-party in the vicarage orchard, our picnics in Hawsley Combe, our botanical and entomological excursions on Chorwell-common, and all the simple pleasures of their childhood and my youth. While this catechism was going on, Miss Tremaine watched us with a disdainful expression, which she evidently did not care to hide.

'I should not have thought you capable of such Arcadian simplicity, Mr. Chrighton,' she said at last. 'Pray continue your recollections. These juvenile experiences are most interesting.'

'I don't expect you to be interested in them, Julia,' Edward answered, with a tone that sounded rather too bitter for a lover. 'I know what a contempt you have for trifling rustic pleasures. Were you ever a child yourself, I wonder, by the way? I don't believe you ever ran after a butterfly in your life.'

Her speech put an end to our talk of the past, somehow. I saw that Edward was vexed, and that all the pleasant memories of his boyhood had fled before that cold scornful face. A young lady in pink, who had been sitting next Julia Tremaine, vacated the sofa, and Edward slipped into her place, and devoted himself for the rest of the evening to his betrothed. I glanced at his bright expressive face now and then as he talked to her, and could not help wondering what charm he could discover in one who seemed to me so unworthy of him.

It was midnight when I went back to my room in the north wing, thoroughly happy in the cordial welcome that had been given me. I rose early next morning—for early rising had long been habitual to me—and, drawing back the damask-curtain that sheltered my window, looked out at the scene below.

I saw a stable-yard, a spacious quadrangle, surrounded by the

closed doors of stables and dog-kennels: low massive buildings of gray stone, with the ivy creeping over them here and there, and with an ancient moss-grown look, that gave them a weird kind of interest in my eyes. This range of stabling must have been disused for a long time, I fancied. The stables now in use were a pile of handsome red-brick buildings at the other extremity of the house, to the rear of the music-room, and forming a striking feature in the back view of the Abbey.

I had often heard how the present Squire's grandfather had kept a pack of hounds, which had been sold immediately after his death; and I knew that my cousin, the present Mr. Chrighton, had been more than once requested to follow his ancestor's good example; for there were no hounds now within twenty miles of the Abbey, though it was a fine country for fox-hunting.

George Chrighton, however—the reigning lord of the Abbey—was not a hunting man. He had, indeed, a secret horror of the sport; for more than one scion of the house had perished untimely in the hunting-field. The family had not been altogether a lucky one, in spite of its wealth and prosperity. It was not often that the goodly heritage had descended to the eldest son. Death in some form or other—on too many occasions a violent death—had come between the heir and his inheritance. And when I pondered on the dark pages in the story of the house, I used to wonder whether my cousin Fanny was ever troubled by morbid forebodings about her only and fondly-loved son.

Was there a ghost at Chrighton—that spectral visitant without which the state and splendour of a grand old house seem scarcely complete? Yes, I had heard vague hints of some shadowy presence that had been seen on rare occasions within the precincts of the Abbey; but I had never been able to ascertain what shape it bore.

Those whom I questioned were prompt to assure me that they had seen nothing. They had heard stories of the past—foolish legends, most likely, not worth listening to. Once, when I had spoken of the subject to my cousin George, he told me angrily never again to let him hear any allusion to *that* folly from my lips.

That December passed merrily. The old house was full of really pleasant people, and the brief winter days were spent in one unbroken round of amusement and gaiety. To me the old familiar English country-house life was a perpetual delight—to feel myself amongst kindred an unceasing pleasure. I could not have believed myself capable of being so completely happy.

I saw a great deal of my cousin Edward, and I think he contrived to make Miss Tremaine understand that, to please him, she must be gracious to me. She certainly took some pains to make herself agreeable to me; and I discovered that, in spite of that

proud disdainful temper, which she so rarely took the trouble to conceal, she was really anxious to gratify her lover.

Their courtship was not altogether a halcyon period. They had frequent quarrels, the details of which Edward's sisters Sophy and Agnes delighted to discuss with me. It was the struggle of two proud spirits for mastery; but my cousin Edward's pride was of the nobler kind—the lofty scorn of all things mean—a pride that does not ill-become a generous nature. To me he seemed all that was admirable, and I was never tired of hearing his mother praise him. I think my cousin Fanny knew this, and that she used to confide in me as fully as if I had been her sister.

'I daresay you can see I am not quite so fond as I should wish to be of Julia Tremaine,' she said to me one day; 'but I am very glad that my son is going to marry. My husband's has not been a fortunate family, you know, Sarah. The eldest sons have been wild and unlucky for generations past; and when Edward was a boy I used to have many a bitter hour, dreading what the future might bring forth. Thank God he has been, and is, all that I can wish. He has never given me an hour's anxiety by any act of his. Yet I am not the less glad of his marriage. The heirs of Chrighton who have come to an untimely end have all died unmarried. There was Hugh Chrighton, in the reign of George the Second, who was killed in a duel; John, who broke his back in the hunting-field thirty years later; Theodore, shot accidentally by a schoolfellow at Eton; Jasper, whose yacht went down in the Mediterranean forty years ago. An awful list, is it not, Sarah? I shall feel as if my son were safer somehow when he is married. It will seem as if he has escaped the ban that has fallen on so many of our house. He will have greater reason to be careful of his life when he is a married man.'

I agreed with Mrs. Chrighton; but could not help wishing that Edward had chosen any other woman than the cold handsome Julia. I could not fancy his future life happy with such a mate.

Christmas came by and by—a real old English Christmas—frost and snow without, warmth and revelry within; skating on the great pond in the park, and sledging on the ice-bound high-roads, by day; private theatricals, charades, and amateur concerts, by night. I was surprised to find that Miss Tremaine refused to take any active part in these evening amusements. She preferred to sit among the elders as a spectator, and had the air and bearing of a princess for whose diversion all our entertainments had been planned. She seemed to think that she fulfilled her mission by sitting still and looking handsome. No desire to show-off appeared to enter her mind. Her intense pride left no room for vanity. Yet I knew that she could have distinguished herself as a musician if she had chosen to do so; for I had heard her sing and play in Mrs. Chrighton's morning-room, when only Edward, his sisters, and myself were pre-

sent; and I knew that both as a vocalist and a pianist she excelled all our guests.

The two girls and I had many a happy morning and afternoon, going from cottage to cottage in a pony-carriage laden with Mrs. Chrighton's gifts to the poor of her parish. There was no public formal distribution of blanketing and coals, but the wants of all were amply provided for in a quiet friendly way. Agnes and Sophy, aided by an indefatigable maid, the Rector's daughter, and one or two other young ladies, had been at work for the last three months making smart warm frocks and useful under-garments for the children of the cottagers; so that on Christmas morning every child in the parish was arrayed in a complete set of new garments. Mrs. Chrighton had an admirable faculty of knowing precisely what was most wanted in every household; and our pony-carriage used to convey a varied collection of goods, every parcel directed in the firm free hand of the châtelaine of the Abbey.

Edward used sometimes to drive us on these expeditions, and I found that he was eminently popular among the poor of Chrighton parish. He had such an airy pleasant way of talking to them, a manner which set them at their ease at once. He never forgot their names or relationships, or wants or ailments; had a packet of exactly the kind of tobacco each man liked best always ready in his coat-pockets; and was full of jokes, which may not have been particularly witty, but which used to make the small low-roofed chambers ring with hearty laughter.

Miss Tremaine coolly declined any share in these pleasant duties.

'I don't like poor people,' she said. 'I daresay it sounds very dreadful, but it's just as well to confess my iniquity at once. I never can get on with them, or they with me. I am not *simpatica*, I suppose. And then I cannot endure their stifling rooms. The close faint odour of their houses gives me a fever. And again, what is the use of visiting them? It is only an inducement to them to become hypocrites. Surely it is better to arrange on a sheet of paper what it is just and fair for them to have—blankets, and coals, and groceries, and money, and wine, and so on—and let them receive the things from some trustworthy servant. In that case, there need be no cringing on one side, and no endurance on the other.'

'But, you see, Julia, there are some kinds of people to whom that sort of thing is not a question of endurance,' Edward answered, his face flushing indignantly. 'People who like to share in the pleasure they give—who like to see the poor careworn faces lighted up with sudden joy—who like to make these sons of the soil feel that there is some friendly link between themselves and their masters—some point of union between the cottage and the great house. There is my mother, for instance: all these duties

which you think so tiresome are to her an unfailing delight. There will be a change, I'm afraid, Julia, when you are mistress of the Abbey.'

'You have not made me that yet,' she answered; 'and there is plenty of time for you to change your mind, if you do not think me suited for the position. I do not pretend to be like your mother. It is better that I should not affect any feminine virtues which I do not possess.'

After this Edward insisted on driving our pony-carriage almost every day, leaving Miss Tremaine to find her own amusement; and I think this conversation was the beginning of an estrangement between them, which became more serious than any of their previous quarrels had been.

Miss Tremaine did not care for sledging, or skating, or billiard-playing. She had none of the 'fast' tendencies which have become so common lately. She used to sit in one particular bow-window of the drawing-room all the morning, working a screen in berlin-wool and beads, assisted and attended by her younger sister Laura, who was a kind of slave to her—a very colourless young lady in mind, capable of no such thing as an original opinion, and in person a pale replica of her sister.

Had there been less company in the house, the breach between Edward Chrighton and his betrothed must have become notorious; but with a house so full of people, all bent on enjoying themselves, I doubt if it was noticed. On all public occasions my cousin showed himself attentive and apparently devoted to Miss Tremaine. It was only I and his sisters who knew the real state of affairs.

I was surprised, after the young lady's total repudiation of all benevolent sentiments, when she beckoned me aside one morning, and slipped a little purse of gold—twenty sovereigns—into my hand.

'I shall be very much obliged if you will distribute that among your cottagers to-day, Miss Chrighton,' she said. 'Of course I should like to give them something; it's only the trouble of talking to them that I shrink from; and you are just the person for an almoner. Don't mention my little commission to any one, please.'

'Of course I may tell Edward,' I said; for I was anxious that he should know his betrothed was not as hard-hearted as she had appeared.

'To him least of all,' she answered eagerly. 'You know that our ideas vary on that point. He would think I gave the money to please him. Not a word, pray, Miss Chrighton.' I submitted, and distributed my sovereigns quietly, with the most careful exercise of my judgment.

So Christmas came and passed. It was the day after the great anniversary—a very quiet day for the guests and family at the Abbey, but a grand occasion for the servants, who were to have

their annual ball in the evening—a ball to which all the humbler class of tenantry were invited. The frost had broken up suddenly, and it was a thorough wet day—a depressing kind of day for any one whose spirits are liable to be affected by the weather, as mine are. I felt out of spirits for the first time since my arrival at the Abbey.

No one else appeared to feel the same influence. The elder ladies sat in a wide semicircle round one of the fireplaces in the drawing-room; a group of merry girls and dashing young men chatted gaily before the other. From the billiard-room there came the frequent clash of balls, and cheery peals of stentorian laughter. I sat in one of the deep windows, half hidden by the curtains, reading a novel—one of a boxful that came from town every month.

If the picture within was bright and cheerful, the prospect was dreary enough without. The fairy forest of snow-wreathed trees, the white valleys and undulating banks of snow, had vanished, and the rain dripped slowly and sullenly upon a darksome expanse of sodden grass, and a dismal background of leafless timber. The merry sound of the sledge-bells no longer enlivened the air; all was silence and gloom.

Edward Chrighton was not amongst the billiard-players; he was pacing the drawing-room to and fro from end to end, with an air that was at once moody and restless.

'Thank heaven, the frost has broken up at last!' he exclaimed, stopping in front of the window where I sat.

He had spoken to himself, quite unaware of my close neighbourhood. Unpromising as his aspect was just then, I ventured to accost him.

'What bad taste, to prefer such weather as this to frost and snow!' I answered. 'The park looked enchanting yesterday—a real scene from fairyland. And only look at it to-day!'

'O yes, of course, from an artistic point of view, the snow was better. The place does look something like the great dismal swamp to-day; but I am thinking of hunting, and that confounded frost made a day's sport impossible. We are in for a spell of mild weather now, I think.'

'But you are not going to hunt, are you, Edward?'

'Indeed I am, my gentle cousin, in spite of that frightened look in your amiable countenance.'

'I thought there were no hounds hereabouts.'

'Nor are there; but there is as fine a pack as any in the country—the Daleborough hounds—five-and-twenty miles away.'

'And you are going five-and-twenty miles for the sake of a day's run?'

'I would travel forty, fifty, a hundred miles for that same diversion. But I am not going for a single day this time; I am going

over to Sir Francis Wycherly's place—young Frank Wycherly and I were sworn chums at Christchurch—for three or four days. I am due to-day, but I scarcely cared to travel by cross-country roads in such rain as this. However, if the floodgates of the sky are loosened for a new deluge, I must go to-morrow.'

'What a headstrong young man!' I exclaimed. 'And what will Miss Tremaine say to this desertion?' I asked in a lower voice.

'Miss Tremaine can say whatever she pleases. She had it in her power to make me forget the pleasures of the chase, if she had chosen, though we had been in the heart of the shires, and the welkin ringing with the baying of hounds.'

'O, I begin to understand. This hunting engagement is not of long standing.'

'No; I began to find myself bored here a few days ago, and wrote to Frank to offer myself for two or three days at Wycherly. I received a most cordial answer by return, and am booked till the end of this week.'

'You have not forgotten the ball on the first?'

'O, no; to do that would be to vex my mother, and to offer a slight to our guests. I shall be here for the first, come what may.'

Come what may! so lightly spoken. The time came when I had bitter occasion to remember those words.

'I'm afraid you will vex your mother by going at all,' I said. 'You know what a horror both she and your father have of hunting.'

'A most un-country-gentleman-like aversion on my father's part. But he is a dear old book-worm, seldom happy out of his library. Yes, I admit they both have a dislike to hunting in the abstract; but they know I am a pretty good rider, and that it would need a bigger country than I shall find about Wycherly to floor me. You need not feel nervous, my dear Sarah; I am not going to give papa and mamma the smallest ground for uneasiness.'

'You will take your own horses, I suppose?'

'That goes without saying. No man who has cattle of his own cares to mount another man's horses. I shall take Pepperbox and the Druid.'

'Pepperbox has a queer temper, I have heard your sisters say.'

'My sisters expect a horse to be a kind of overgrown baa-lamb. Everything splendid in horseflesh and womankind is prone to that slight defect, an ugly temper. There is Miss Tremaine, for instance.'

'I shall take Miss Tremaine's part. I believe it is you who are in the wrong in the matter of this estrangement, Edward.'

'Do you? Well, wrong or right, my cousin, until the fair Julia comes to me with sweet looks and gentle words, we can never be what we have been.'

'You will return from your hunting expedition in a softer mood,'

I answered; 'that is to say, if you persist in going. But I hope and believe you will change your mind.'

'Such a change is not within the limits of possibility, Sarah. I am fixed as Fate.'

He strolled away, humming some gay hunting-song as he went. I was alone with Mrs. Chrighton later in the afternoon, and she spoke to me about this intended visit to Wycherly.

'Edward has set his heart upon it evidently,' she said regretfully, 'and his father and I have always made a point of avoiding anything that could seem like domestic tyranny. Our dear boy is such a good son, that it would be very hard if we came between him and his pleasures. You know what a morbid horror my husband has of the dangers of the hunting-field, and perhaps I am almost as weak-minded. But in spite of this we have never interfered with Edward's enjoyment of a sport which he is passionately fond of; and hitherto, thank God! he has escaped without a scratch. Yet I have had many a bitter hour, I can assure you, my dear, when my son has been away in Leicestershire hunting four days a week.'

'He rides well, I suppose.'

'Superbly. He has a great reputation among the sportsmen of our neighbourhood. I daresay when he is master of the Abbey he will start a pack of hounds, and revive the old days of his great-grandfather, Meredith Chrighton.'

'I fancy the hounds were kenneled in the stable-yard below my bedroom window in those days, were they not, Fanny?'

'Yes,' Mrs. Chrighton answered gravely; and I wondered at the sudden shadow that fell upon her face.

I went up to my room earlier than usual that afternoon, and I had a clear hour to spare before it would be time to dress for the seven o'clock dinner. This leisure hour I intended to devote to letter-writing; but on arriving in my room I found myself in a very idle frame of mind, and instead of opening my desk, I seated myself in the low easy-chair before the fire, and fell into a reverie.

How long I had been sitting there I scarcely know; I had been half meditating, half dozing, mixing broken snatches of thought with brief glimpses of dreaming, when I was startled into wakefulness by a sound that was strange to me.

It was a huntsman's horn—a few low plaintive notes on a huntsman's horn—notes which had a strange far-away sound, that was more unearthly than anything my ears had ever heard. I thought of the music in *Der Freischutz;* but the weirdest snatch of melody Weber ever wrote had not so ghastly a sound as these few simple notes conveyed to my ear.

I stood transfixed, listening to that awful music. It had grown dusk, my fire was almost out, and the room in shadow. As I listened, a light flashed suddenly on the wall before me. The light

was as unearthly as the sound—a light that never shone from earth or sky.

I ran to the window; for this ghastly shimmer flashed through the window upon the opposite wall. The great gates of the stable-yard were open, and men in scarlet coats were riding in, a pack of hounds crowding in before them, obedient to the huntsman's whip. The whole scene was dimly visible by the declining light of the winter evening and the weird gleams of a lantern carried by one of the men. It was this lantern which had shone upon the tapestried wall. I saw the stable-doors opened one after another; gentlemen and grooms alighting from their horses; the dogs driven into their kennel; the helpers hurrying to and fro; and that strange wan lantern-light glimmering here and there in the gathering dusk. But there was no sound of horse's hoof or of human voices—not one yelp or cry from the hounds. Since those faint far-away sounds of the horn had died out in the distance, the ghastly silence had been unbroken.

I stood at my window quite calmly, and watched while the group of men and animals in the yard below noiselessly dispersed. There was nothing supernatural in the manner of their disappearance. The figures did not vanish or melt into empty air. One by one I saw the horses led into their separate quarters; one by one the redcoats strolled out of the gates, and the grooms departed, some one way, some another. The scene, but for its noiselessness, was natural enough; and had I been a stranger in the house, I might have fancied that those figures were real—those stables in full occupation.

But I knew that stable-yard and all its range of building to have been disused for more than half a century. Could I believe that, without an hour's warning, the long-deserted quadrangle could be filled—the empty stalls tenanted?

Had some hunting-party from the neighbourhood sought shelter here, glad to escape the pitiless rain? That was not impossible, I thought. I was an utter unbeliever in all ghostly things—ready to credit any possibility rather than suppose that I had been looking upon shadows. And yet the noiselessness, the awful sound of that horn—the strange unearthly gleam of that lantern! Little superstitious as I might be, a cold sweat stood out upon my forehead, and I trembled in every limb.

For some minutes I stood by the window, statue-like, staring blankly into the empty quadrangle. Then I roused myself suddenly, and ran softly downstairs by a back staircase leading to the servants' quarters, determined to solve the mystery somehow or other. The way to Mrs. Marjorum's room was familiar to me from old experience, and it was thither that I bent my steps, determined to ask the housekeeper the meaning of what I had seen. I had a lurking conviction that it would be well for me not to mention that scene to

any member of the family till I had taken counsel with some one who knew the secrets of Chrighton Abbey.

I heard the sound of merry voices and laughter as I passed the kitchen and servants' hall. Men and maids were all busy in the pleasant labour of decorating their rooms for the evening's festival. They were putting the last touches to garlands of holly and laurel, ivy and fir, as I passed the open doors; and in both rooms I saw tables laid for a substantial tea. The housekeeper's room was in a retired nook at the end of a long passage—a charming old room, panelled with dark oak, and full of capacious cupboards, which in my childhood I had looked upon as storehouses of inexhaustible treasures in the way of preserves and other confectionery. It was a shady old room, with a wide old-fashioned fireplace, cool in summer, when the hearth was adorned with a great jar of roses and lavender; and warm in winter, when the logs burnt merrily all day long.

I opened the door softly, and went in. Mrs. Marjorum was dozing in a high-backed arm-chair by the glowing hearth, dressed in her state gown of gray watered silk, and with a cap that was a perfect garden of roses. She opened her eyes as I approached her, and stared at me with a puzzled look for the first moment or so.

'Why, is that you, Miss Sarah?' she exclaimed; 'and looking as pale as a ghost, I can see, even by this fire-light! Let me just light a candle, and then I'll get you some sal volatile. Sit down in my arm-chair, miss; why, I declare you're all of a tremble!'

She put me into her easy-chair before I could resist, and lighted the two candles which stood ready upon her table, while I was trying to speak. My lips were dry, and it seemed at first as if my voice was gone.

'Never mind the sal volatile, Marjorum,' I said at last. 'I am not ill; I've been startled, that's all; and I've come to ask you for an explanation of the business that frightened me.'

'What business, Miss Sarah?'

'You must have heard something of it yourself, surely. Didn't you hear a horn just now, a huntsman's horn?'

'A horn! Lord no, Miss Sarah. What ever could have put such a fancy into your head?'

I saw that Mrs. Marjorum's ruddy cheeks had suddenly lost their colour, that she was now almost as pale as I could have been myself.

'It was no fancy,' I said; 'I heard the sound, and saw the people. A hunting-party has just taken shelter in the north quadrangle. Dogs and horses, and gentlemen and servants.'

'What were they like, Miss Sarah?' the housekeeper asked in a strange voice.

'I can hardly tell you that. I could see that they wore red coats; and I could scarcely see more than that. Yes, I did get a

glimpse of one of the gentlemen by the light of the lantern. A tall man, with gray hair and whiskers, and a stoop in his shoulders. I noticed that he wore a short-waisted coat with a very high collar—a coat that looked a hundred years old.'

'The old Squire!' muttered Mrs. Marjorum under her breath; and then turning to me, she said with a cheery resolute air, 'You've been dreaming, Miss Sarah, that's just what it is. You've dropped off in your chair before the fire, and had a dream, that's it.'

'No, Marjorum, it was no dream. The horn woke me, and I stood at my window and saw the dogs and huntsmen come in.'

'Do you know, Miss Sarah, that the gates of the north quadrangle have been locked and barred for the last forty years, and that no one ever goes in there except through the house?'

'The gates may have been opened this evening to give shelter to strangers,' I said.

'Not when the only keys that will open them hang yonder in my cupboard, miss,' said the housekeeper, pointing to a corner of the room.

'But I tell you, Marjorum, these people came into the quadrangle; the horses and dogs are in the stables and kennels at this moment. I'll go and ask Mr. Chrighton, or my cousin Fanny, or Edward, all about it, since you won't tell me the truth.'

I said this with a purpose, and it answered. Mrs. Marjorum caught me eagerly by the wrist.

'No, miss, don't do that; for pity's sake don't do that; don't breathe a word to missus or master.'

'But why not?'

'Because you've seen that which always brings misfortune and sorrow to this house, Miss Sarah. You've seen the dead.'

'What do you mean?' I gasped, awed in spite of myself.

'I daresay you've heard say that there's been *something* seen at times at the Abbey—many years apart, thank God; for it never came that trouble didn't come after it.'

'Yes,' I answered hurriedly; 'but I could never get any one to tell me what it was that haunted this place.'

'No, miss. Those that know have kept the secret. But you have seen it all to-night. There's no use in trying to hide it from you any longer. You have seen the old Squire, Meredith Chrighton, whose eldest son was killed by a fall in the hunting-field, brought home dead one December night, an hour after his father and the rest of the party had come safe home to the Abbey. The old gentleman had missed his son in the field, but had thought nothing of that, fancying that master John had had enough of the day's sport, and had turned his horse's head homewards. He was found by a labouring-man, poor lad, lying in a ditch with his back broken, and his horse beside him staked. The old Squire never held his head up

after that day, and never rode to hounds again, though he was passionately fond of hunting. Dogs and horses were sold, and the north quadrangle has been empty from that day.'

'How long is it since this kind of thing has been seen?'

'A long time, miss. I was a slip of a girl when it last happened. It was in the winter-time—this very night—the night Squire Meredith's son was killed; and the house was full of company, just as it is now. There was a wild young Oxford gentleman sleeping in your room at that time, and he saw the hunting-party come into the quadrangle; and what did he do but throw his window wide open, and give them the view-hallo as loud as ever he could. He had only arrived the day before, and knew nothing about the neighbourhood; so at dinner he began to ask where were his friends the sportsmen, and to hope he should be allowed to have a run with the Abbey hounds next day. It was in the time of our master's father; and his lady at the head of the table turned as white as a sheet when she heard this talk. She had good reason, poor soul. Before the week was out her husband was lying dead. He was struck with a fit of apoplexy, and never spoke or knew any one afterwards.'

'An awful coincidence,' I said; 'but it may have been only a coincidence.'

'I've heard other stories, miss—heard them from those that wouldn't deceive—all proving the same thing: that the appearance of the old Squire and his pack is a warning of death to this house.'

'I cannot believe these things,' I exclaimed; 'I *cannot* believe them. Does Mr. Edward know anything about this?'

'No, miss. His father and mother have been most careful that it should be kept from him.'

'I think he is too strong-minded to be much affected by the fact,' I said.

'And you'll not say anything about what you've seen to my master or my mistress, will you, Miss Sarah?' pleaded the faithful old servant. 'The knowledge of it would be sure to make them nervous and unhappy. And if evil is to come upon this house, it isn't in human power to prevent its coming.'

'God forbid that there is any evil at hand!' I answered. 'I am no believer in visions or omens. After all, I would sooner fancy that I was dreaming—dreaming with my eyes open as I stood at the window—than that I beheld the shadows of the dead.'

Mrs. Marjorum sighed, and said nothing. I could see that she believed firmly in the phantom hunt.

I went back to my room to dress for dinner. However rationally I might try to think of what I had seen, its effect upon my mind and nerves was not the less powerful. I could think of nothing else; and a strange morbid dread of coming misery weighed me down like an actual burden.

There was a very cheerful party in the drawing-room when I went downstairs, and at dinner the talk and laughter were unceasing; but I could see that my cousin Fanny's face was a little graver than usual, and I had no doubt she was thinking of her son's intended visit to Wycherly.

At the thought of this a sudden terror flashed upon me. How if the shadows I had seen that evening were ominous of danger to him—to Edward, the heir and only son of the house? My heart grew cold as I thought of this, and yet in the next moment I despised myself for such weakness.

'It is natural enough for an old servant to believe in such things,' I said to myself; 'but for me—an educated woman of the world—preposterous folly.'

And yet from that moment I began to puzzle myself in the endeavour to devise some means by which Edward's journey might be prevented. Of my own influence I knew that I was powerless to hinder his departure by so much as an hour; but I fancied that Julia Tremaine could persuade him to any sacrifice of his inclination, if she could only humble her pride so far as to entreat it. I determined to appeal to her in the course of the evening.

We were very merry all that evening. The servants and their guests danced in the great hall, while we sat in the gallery above, and in little groups upon the staircase, watching their diversions. I think this arrangement afforded excellent opportunities for flirtation, and that the younger members of our party made good use of their chances—with one exception: Edward Chrighton and his affianced contrived to keep far away from each other all the evening.

While all was going on noisily in the hall below, I managed to get Miss Tremaine apart from the others in the embrasure of a painted window on the stairs, where there was a wide oaken seat. Seated here side by side, I described to her, under a promise of secrecy, the scene which I had witnessed that afternoon, and my conversation with Mrs. Marjorum.

'But, good gracious me, Miss Chrighton!' the young lady exclaimed, lifting her pencilled eyebrows with unconcealed disdain, 'you don't mean to tell me that you believe in such nonsense—ghosts and omens, and old woman's folly like that!'

'I assure you, Miss Tremaine, it is most difficult for me to believe in the supernatural,' I answered earnestly; 'but that which I saw this evening was something more than human. The thought of it has made me very unhappy; and I cannot help connecting it somehow with my cousin Edward's visit to Wycherly. If I had the power to prevent his going, I would do it at any cost; but I have not. You alone have influence enough for that. For heaven's sake use it! do anything to hinder his hunting with the Daleborough hounds.'

'You would have me humiliate myself by asking him to forego

his pleasure, and that after his conduct to me during the last week?'

'I confess that he has done much to offend you. But you love him, Miss Tremaine, though you are too proud to let your love be seen; I am certain that you do love him. For pity's sake speak to him; do not let him hazard his life, when a few words from you may prevent the danger.'

'I don't believe he would give up this visit to please me,' she answered; 'and I shall certainly not put it in his power to humiliate me by a refusal. Besides, all this fear of yours is such utter nonsense. As if nobody had ever hunted before. My brothers hunt four times a week every winter, and not one of them has ever been the worse for it yet.'

I did not give up the attempt lightly. I pleaded with this proud obstinate girl for a long time, as long as I could induce her to listen to me; but it was all in vain. She stuck to her text—no one should persuade her to degrade herself by asking a favour of Edward Chrighton. He had chosen to hold himself aloof from her, and she would show him that she could live without him. When she left Chrighton Abbey, they would part as strangers.

So the night closed, and at breakfast next morning I heard that Edward had started for Wycherly soon after daybreak. His absence made, for me at least, a sad blank in our circle. For one other also, I think; for Miss Tremaine's fair proud face was very pale, though she tried to seem gayer than usual, and exerted herself in quite an unaccustomed manner in her endeavour to be agreeable to every one.

The days passed slowly for me after my cousin's departure. There was a weight upon my mind, a vague anxiety, which I struggled in vain to shake off. The house, full as it was of pleasant people, seemed to me to have become dull and dreary now that Edward was gone. The place where he had sat appeared always vacant to my eyes, though another filled it, and there was no gap on either side of the long dinner-table. Lighthearted young men still made the billiard-room resonant with their laughter; merry girls flirted as gaily as ever, undisturbed in the smallest degree by the absence of the heir of the house. Yet for me all was changed. A morbid fancy had taken complete possession of me. I found myself continually brooding over the housekeeper's words; those words which had told me that the shadows I had seen boded death and sorrow to the house of Chrighton.

My cousins, Sophy and Agnes, were no more concerned about their brother's welfare than were their guests. They were full of excitement about the new-year's ball, which was to be a very grand affair. Every one of importance within fifty miles was to be present, every nook and corner of the Abbey would be filled with visitors coming from a great distance, while others were to be billeted upon

the better class of tenantry round about. Altogether the organisation of this affair was no small business; and Mrs. Chrighton's mornings were broken by discussions with the housekeeper, messages from the cook, interviews with the head-gardener on the subject of floral decorations, and other details, which all alike demanded the attention of the châtelaine herself. With these duties, and with the claims of her numerous guests, my cousin Fanny's time was so fully occupied, that she had little leisure to indulge in anxious feelings about her son, whatever secret uneasiness may have been lurking in her maternal heart. As for the master of the Abbey, he spent so much of his time in the library, where, under the pretext of business with his bailiff, he read Greek, that it was not easy for any one to discover what he did feel. Once, and once only, I heard him speak of his son, in a tone that betrayed an intense eagerness for his return.

The girls were to have new dresses from a French milliner in Wigmore-street; and as the great event drew near, bulky packages of millinery were continually arriving, and feminine consultations and expositions of finery were being held all day long in bedrooms and dressing-rooms with closed doors. Thus, with a mind always troubled by the same dark shapeless foreboding, I was perpetually being called upon to give an opinion about pink tulle and lilies of the valley, or maize silk and apple-blossoms.

New-year's morning came at last, after an interval of abnormal length, as it seemed to me. It was a bright clear day, an almost spring-like sunshine lighting up the leafless landscape. The great dining-room was noisy with congratulations and good wishes as we assembled for breakfast on this first morning of a new year, after having seen the old one out cheerily the night before; but Edward had not yet returned, and I missed him sadly. Some touch of sympathy drew me to the side of Julia Tremaine on this particular morning. I had watched her very often during the last few days, and I had seen that her cheek grew paler every day. To-day her eyes had the dull heavy look that betokens a sleepless night. Yes, I was sure that she was unhappy—that the proud relentless nature suffered bitterly.

'He must be home to-day,' I said to her in a low voice, as she sat in stately silence before an untasted breakfast.

'Who must?' she answered, turning towards me with a cold distant look.

'My cousin Edward. You know he promised to be back in time for the ball.'

'I know nothing of Mr. Chrighton's intended movements,' she said in her haughtiest tone; 'but of course it is only natural that he should be here to-night. He would scarcely care to insult half the county by his absence, however little he may value those now staying in his father's house.'

'But you know that there is one here whom he does value better than any one else in the world, Miss Tremaine,' I answered, anxious to soothe this proud girl.

'I know nothing of the kind. But why do you speak so solemnly about his return? He will come, of course. There is no reason he should not come.'

She spoke in a rapid manner that was strange to her, and looked at me with a sharp inquiring glance, that touched me somehow, it was so unlike herself—it revealed to me so keen an anxiety.

'No, there is no reasonable cause for anything like uneasiness,' I said; 'but you remember what I told you the other night. That has preyed upon my mind, and it will be an unspeakable relief to me when I see my cousin safe at home.'

'I am sorry that you should indulge in such weakness, Miss Chrighton.'

That was all she said; but when I saw her in the drawing-room after breakfast, she had established herself in a window that commanded a view of the long winding drive leading to the front of the Abbey. From this point she could not fail to see any one approaching the house. She sat there all day; every one else was more or less busy with arrangements for the evening, or at any rate occupied with an appearance of business; but Julia Tremaine kept her place by the window, pleading a headache as an excuse for sitting still, with a book in her hand, all day, yet obstinately refusing to go to her room and lie down, when her mother entreated her to do so.

'You will be fit for nothing to-night, Julia,' Mrs. Tremaine said, almost angrily; 'you have been looking ill for ever so long, and to-day you are as pale as a ghost.'

I knew that she was watching for *him;* and I pitied her with all my heart, as the day wore itself out, and he did not come.

We dined earlier than usual, played a game or two of billiards after dinner, made a tour of inspection through the bright rooms, lit with wax-candles only, and odorous with exotics; and then came a long interregnum devoted to the arts and mysteries of the toilet; while maids flitted to and fro laden with frilled muslin petticoats from the laundry, and a faint smell of singed hair pervaded the corridors. At ten o'clock the band were tuning their violins, and pretty girls and elegant-looking men were coming slowly down the broad oak staircase, as the roll of fast-coming wheels sounded louder without, and stentorian voices announced the best people in the county.

I have no need to dwell long upon the details of that evening's festival. It was very much like other balls—a brilliant success, a night of splendour and enchantment for those whose hearts were light and happy, and who could abandon themselves utterly to the pleasure of the moment; a far-away picture of fair faces and bright-

hued dresses, a wearisome kaleidoscopic procession of form and colour for those whose minds were weighed down with the burden of a hidden care.

For me the music had no melody, the dazzling scene no charm. Hour after hour went by; supper was over, and the waltzers were enjoying those latest dances which always seem the most delightful, and yet Edward Chrighton had not appeared amongst us.

There had been innumerable inquiries about him, and Mrs. Chrighton had apologised for his absence as best she might. Poor soul, I well knew that his non-return was now a source of poignant anxiety to her, although she greeted all her guests with the same gracious smile, and was able to talk gaily and well upon every subject. Once, when she was sitting alone for a few minutes, watching the dancers, I saw the smile fade from her face, and a look of anguish come over it. I ventured to approach her at this moment, and never shall I forget the look which she turned towards me.

'My son, Sarah!' she said in a low voice—'something has happened to my son!'

I did my best to comfort her; but my own heart was growing heavier and heavier, and my attempt was a very poor one.

Julia Tremaine had danced a little at the beginning of the evening, to keep up appearances, I believe, in order that no one might suppose that she was distressed by her lover's absence; but after the first two or three dances she pronounced herself tired, and withdrew to a seat amongst the matrons. She was looking very lovely in spite of her extreme pallor, dressed in white tulle, a perfect cloud of airy puffings, and with a wreath of ivy-leaves and diamonds crowning her pale golden hair.

The night waned, the dancers were revolving in the last waltz, when I happened to look towards the doorway at the end of the room. I was startled by seeing a man standing there, with his hat in his hand, not in evening costume; a man with a pale anxious-looking face, peering cautiously into the room. My first thought was of evil; but in the next moment the man had disappeared, and I saw no more of him.

I lingered by my cousin Fanny's side till the rooms were empty. Even Sophy and Aggy had gone off to their own apartments, their airy dresses sadly dilapidated by a night's vigorous dancing. There were only Mr. and Mrs. Chrighton and myself in the long suite of rooms, where the flowers were drooping and the wax-lights dying out one by one in the silver sconces against the walls.

'I think the evening went off very well,' Fanny said, looking rather anxiously at her husband, who was stretching himself and yawning with an air of intense relief.

'Yes, the affair went off well enough. But Edward has com-

mitted a terrible breach of manners by not being here. Upon my word, the young men of the present day think of nothing but their own pleasures. I suppose that something especially attractive was going on at Wycherly to-day, and he couldn't tear himself away.'

'It is so unlike him to break his word,' Mrs. Chrighton answered. 'You are not alarmed, Frederick? You don't think that anything has happened—any accident?'

'What should happen? Ned is one of the best riders in the county. I don't think there's any fear of his coming to grief.'

'He might be ill.'

'Not he. He's a young Hercules. And if it were possible for him to be ill—which it is not—we should have had a message from Wycherly.'

The words were scarcely spoken when Truefold the old butler stood by his master's side, with a solemn anxious face.

'There is a—a person who wishes to see you, sir,' he said in a low voice, 'alone.'

Low as the words were, both Fanny and myself heard them.

'Some one from Wycherly?' she exclaimed. 'Let him come here.'

'But, madam, the person most particularly wished to see master alone.—Shall I show him into the library, sir? The lights are not out there.'

'Then it *is* some one from Wycherly,' said my cousin, seizing my wrist with a hand that was icy cold. 'Didn't I tell you so, Sarah? Something has happened to my son. Let the person come here, Truefold, here; I insist upon it.'

The tone of command was quite strange in a wife who was always deferential to her husband, in a mistress who was ever gentle to her servants.

'Let it be so, Truefold,' said Mr. Chrighton. 'Whatever ill news has come to us we will hear together.'

He put his arm round his wife's waist. Both were pale as marble, both stood in stony stillness waiting for the blow that was to fall upon them.

The stranger, the man I had seen in the doorway, came in. He was curate of Wycherly church, and chaplain to Sir Francis Wycherly; a grave middle-aged man. He told what he had to tell with all kindness, with all the usual forms of consolation which Christianity and an experience of sorrow could suggest. Vain words, wasted trouble. The blow must fall, and earthly consolation was unable to lighten it by a feather's weight.

There had been a steeplechase at Wycherly—an amateur affair with gentlemen riders—on that bright new-year's-day, and Edward Chrighton had been persuaded to ride his favourite hunter Pepperbox. There would be plenty of time for him to return to Chrighton

after the races. He had consented; and his horse was winning easily, when, at the last fence, a double one, with water beyond, Pepperbox baulked his leap, and went over head-foremost, flinging his rider over a hedge into a field close beside the course, where there was a heavy stone roller. Upon this stone roller Edward Chrighton had fallen, his head receiving the full force of the concussion. All was told. It was while the curate was relating the fatal catastrophe that I looked round suddenly, and saw Julia Tremaine standing a little way behind the speaker. She had heard all; she uttered no cry, she showed no signs of fainting, but stood calm and motionless, waiting for the end.

I know not how that night ended: there seemed an awful calm upon us all. A carriage was got ready, and Mr. and Mrs. Chrighton started for Wycherly to look upon their dead son. He had died while they were carrying him from the course to Sir Francis's house. I went with Julia Tremaine to her room, and sat with her while the winter morning dawned slowly upon us—a bitter dawning.

I have little more to tell. Life goes on, though hearts are broken. Upon Chrighton Abbey there came a dreary time of desolation. The master of the house lived in his library, shut from the outer world, buried almost as completely as a hermit in his cell. I have heard that Julia Tremaine was never known to smile after that day. She is still unmarried, and lives entirely at her father's country house; proud and reserved in her conduct to her equals, but a very angel of mercy and compassion amongst the poor of the neighbourhood. Yes; this haughty girl, who once declared herself unable to endure the hovels of the poor, is now a Sister of Charity in all but the robe. So does a great sorrow change the current of a woman's life.

I have seen my cousin Fanny many times since that awful new-year's night; for I have always the same welcome at the Abbey. I have seen her calm and cheerful, doing her duty, smiling upon her daughter's children, the honoured mistress of a great household; but I know that the mainspring of life is broken, that for her there hath passed a glory from the earth, and that upon all the pleasures and joys of this world she looks with the solemn calm of one for whom all things are dark with the shadow of a great sorrow.